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James Purdy

EVERYTHING UNDER THE SUN

"I don't like to make things hard for you," Jesse said to Cade, "but when you act like this I don't know what's going to happen. You don't like nothing I do for you anyhow."

The two boys, Jesse and Cade, shared a room over the south end of State Street. Jesse had a job, but Cade, who was fifteen, seldom could find work. They were both down to their last few dollars.

"I told you a man was coming up here to offer me a job," Cade said.

"You can't wait for a man to come offering you a job," Jesse said. He laughed. "What kind of a man would that be anyhow."

Cade laughed too because he knew Jesse did not believe anything he said.

"This man did promise me," Cade explained, and Jesse snorted.

"Don't pick your nose like that," Jesse said to Cade. "What if the man seen you picking."

Cade said the man wouldn't care.

"What does this man do?" Jesse wondered.

"He said he had a nice line of goods I could sell for him and make good money," Cade replied.

"Good money selling," Jesse laughed. "My advice to you is go out and look for a job, any job, and not wait for no old man to come to teach you to sell."

"Well nobody else wants to hire me due to my face," Cade said.

"What's wrong with your face?" Jesse wanted to know. "Outside of you picking your nose all the time you have as good a face as anybody's."

"I can't look people in the eye is what," Cade told him.

Jesse got up and walked around the small room.

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"Like I told you," Jesse began the same speech he always gave when Cade was out of work, "I would do anything for you on account of your brother. He saved my life in the goddam army and I ain't never going to forget that."

Cade made his little expression of boredom which was to pinch the bridge of his nose.

"But you got to work sometimes!" Jesse exploded. "I don't get enough for two!"

Cade grimaced, and did not let go the bridge of his nose because he knew this irritated Jesse almost as much as his picking did, but Jesse could not criticize him for just holding his nose, and that made him all the angrier.

"And you stay out of them arcades too!" Jesse said to Cade. "Spending the money looking at them pictures," Jesse began. "For the love of. . . ." Suddenly Jesse stopped short.

"For the love of what?" Cade jumped him. He knew the reason that Jesse did not finish the sentence with a swear word was he went now to the Jesus Saves Mission every night, and since he had got religion he had quit being quite so friendly to Cade as before, cooler and more distant, and he talked, like today, about how good work is for everybody.

"That old man at the trucking office should have never told you you had a low IQ," Jesse returned to this difficulty of Cade's finding work.

But this remark did not touch Cade today.

"Jesse," Cade said, "I don't care about it."

"You don't care!" Jesse flared up.

"That's right," Cade said, and he got up and took out a piece of cigarette from his pants cuff, and lit a match to the stub. "I don't believe in IQs," Cade said.

"Did you get that butt off the street?" Jesse wanted to know, his protective manner making his voice soft again.

"I ain't answering that question," Cade told him.

"Cade, why don't you be nice to me like you used to be," Jesse said.

"Why don't *I* be nice to *you*!" Cade exclaimed with savagery.

Suddenly frightened, Jesse said, "Now simmer down." He was always afraid when Cade suddenly acted too excited.

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"You leave me alone," Cade said. "I ain't interferin' with your life, and don't you interfere with mine. The little life I have, that is." He grunted.

"I owe something to you and that's why I can't just let you be any old way you feel like being," Jesse said.

"You don't owe me a thing," Cade told him.

"I know who I owe and who I don't," Jesse replied.

"You always say you owe me on account of my brother saved your life just before he got hisself blowed up."

"Cade, you be careful!" Jesse warned, and his head twitched as he spoke.

"I'm glad he's gone," Cade said, but without the emotion he usually expressed when he spoke of his brother. He had talked against his brother so long in times past in order to get Jesse riled up that it had lost nearly all meaning for both of them. "Yes, sir, I don't care!" Cade repeated.

Jesse moved his lips silently and Cade knew he was praying for help.

Jesse opened his eyes wide then and looking straight at Cade, twisted his lips, trying not to let the swear words come out, and said: "All right, Cade," after a long struggle.

"And if religion is going to make you close with your money," Cade began looking at Jesse's mouth, "close and *mean,* too, then I can clear out of here. I don't need you, Jesse."

"What put the idea into your head religion made me close with my money?" Jesse said, and he turned very pale.

"You need me here, but you don't want to pay what it takes to keep me," Cade said.

Jesse trembling walked over to Cade very close and stared at him.

Cade watched him, ready.

Jesse said, "You can stay here as long as you ever want to. And no questions asked." Having said this, Jesse turned away, a glassy look on his face, and stared at the cracked calcimine of their wall.

"On account of my old brother I can stay!" Cade yelled.

"All right then!" Jesse shouted back, but fear on his face. Then softening with a strange weakness he said, "No, Cade, that's not it either," and he went over and put his arm on Cade's shoulder.

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"Don't touch me," Cade said. "I don't want none of that *brother* love. Keep your distance."

"You behave," Jesse said, struggling with his emotion.

"Ever since you give up women and drinking you been picking on me," Cade said. "I do the best I can."

Cade waited for Jesse to say something.

"And you think picking on me all the time makes you get a star in heaven, I suppose," Cade said weakly.

Jesse, who was not listening, walked the length of the cramped little room. Because of the heat of the night and the heat of the discussion, he took off his shirt. On his chest was tattooed a crouched black panther, and on his right arm above his elbow a large unfolding flower.

"I did want to do right by you but maybe we *had* better part," Jesse said, crossing his arms across his chest. He spoke like a man in his sleep, but immediately he had spoken, a scared look passed over his face.

Cade suddenly went white. He moved over to the window.

"I can't do no more for you!" Jesse cried, alarmed but helpless at his own emotion. "It ain't in me to do no more for you! Can't you see that, Cade. Only so much, no more!"

When there was no answer from Cade, Jesse said, "Do you hear what I say?"

Cade did not speak.

"Fact is," Jesse began again, as though explaining now to himself, "I don't seem to care about nothing. I just want somehow to sit and not move or do nothing. I don't know what it is."

"You never did give a straw if I lived or died, Jesse," Cade said, and he just managed to control his angry tears.

Jesse was silent, as on the evenings when alone in the dark, while Cade was out looking for a job, he had tried to figure out what he should do in his trouble.

"*Fact* is," Cade now whirled from the window, his eyes brimming with tears, "it's all the other way around. I don't need you except for money, but you need me *to tell you who you are!*"

"What?" Jesse said, thunderstruck.

"You know goddam well *what*," Cade said, and he wiped the tears off his face with his fist. "On account of you don't know who you are, that's why."

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"You little crumb," Jesse began, and he moved threateningly, but then half remembering his nights at the Mission, he walked around the room, muttering.

"Where are my cigarettes?" Jesse said suddenly. "Did you take them?"

"I thought you swore off when you got religion," Cade said.

"Yeah," Jesse said in the tone of voice more like his old self, and he went up to Cade, who was smoking another butt.

"Give me your smoke," he said to Cade.

Cade passed it to him, staring.

"I don't think you heard what I said about leaving," Cade told Jesse.

"I heard you," Jesse said.

"Well, I'm going to leave you, Jesse. God damn you."

Jesse just nodded from where he now sat on a crate they used as a chair. He groaned a little like the smoke was disagreeable for him.

"Like I say, Jesse," and Cade's face was dry of tears now. "It may be hard for me to earn money, but I know who I am. I may be dumb, but I'm *all together*!"

"Cade," Jesse said sucking on the cigarette furiously, "I didn't mean for you to go. After all there is a lot between us."

Jesse's fingers moved nervously over the last tiny fragment of the cigarette.

"Do you have any more smokes in your pants cuff or anywhere?" Jesse asked, as though he were the younger and the weaker of the two now.

"I have, but I don't think I should give any to a religious man," Cade replied.

Jesse tightened his mouth.

Cade handed him another of the butts.

"What are you going to offer me, if I do decide to stay," Cade said suddenly. "On account of this time I'm not going to stay if you don't give me an offer!"

Jesse stood up suddenly, dropping his cigarette, the smoke coming out of his mouth as though he had all gone to smoke inside himself.

"What am I going to offer you?" Jesse said like a man in a dream. "What?" he said sleepily.

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Then waving his arms, Jesse cried, "All right! Get out!"

And suddenly letting go at last he struck Cade across the mouth, bringing some blood. "Now you git," he said. "Git out."

Jesse panted, walking around the room. "You been bleedin' me white for a year. That's the reason I'm the way I am. I'm bled white."

Cade went mechanically to the bureau, took out a shirt, a pair of shorts, a toothbrush, his straight razor, and a small red box. He put these in a small bag such as an athlete might carry to his gym. He walked over to the door and went out.

Below, on the sidewalk, directly under the room where he and Jesse had lived together a year, Cade stood waiting for the streetcar. He knew Jesse was looking down on him. He did not have to wait long.

"Cade," Jesse's voice came from the window. "You get back here, Cade, goddam you." Jesse hearing the first of his profanity let loose at last, swore a lot more then, as though he had found his mind again in swearing.

A streetcar stopped at that moment.

"Don't get on that car, Cade," Jesse cried. "Goddam it."

Cade affected impatience.

"You wait now, goddam you," Jesse said putting on his rose-colored shirt.

"Cade," Jesse began when he was on the street beside his friend. "Let's go somewhere and talk this over . . . See how I am," he pointed to his trembling arm.

"There ain't nowhere to go since you give up drinking," Cade told him.

Jesse took Cade's bag for him.

"Well if it makes you unhappy I'll drink with you," Jesse said.

"I don't mind being unhappy," Cade said. "It's *you* that minds, Jesse."

"I want you to forgive me, Cade," Jesse said, putting his hand on Cade's arm.

Cade allowed Jesse's arm to rest there.

"Well, Jesse," Cade said coldly.

"You see," Jesse began, pulling Cade gently along with him as they walked toward a tavern. "You see, I don't know what it is, Cade, but you know everything."

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Cade watched him.

They went into the tavern and although they usually sat at the bar, today they chose a table. They ordered beer.

"You see, Cade, I've lied to you, I think, and you're right. Of course your brother did save my life, but you saved it again. I mean you saved it more. You saved me," and he stretched out his trembling arm at Cade.

Jesse seeing the impassive look on Cade's face stopped and then going on as though he did not care whether anybody heard him or not, he said: "You're all I've got, Cade."

Cade was going to say *all right now* but Jesse went on speaking frantically and fluently as he had never spoken before. "You know ever since the war, I've been like I am . . . And Cade, I need you that's why . . . I know you don't need me," he nodded like an old man now. "But I don't care now. I ain't proud no more about it."

Jesse stopped talking and a globule of spit rested thickly on his mouth.

"I'm cured of being proud, Cade."

"Well all right then," Cade finally said, folding his arms and compressing his mouth.

"All right?" Jesse said, a silly look on his face, which had turned very young again.

"But you leave me alone now if I stay," Cade said.

"I will," Jesse said, perhaps not quite sure what it was Cade meant. "You can do anything you want, Cade. All I need is to know you won't really run out. No matter what I might some day say or do, you stay, Cade!"

"Then I don't want to hear no more about me getting just any old job," Cade said, drinking a swallow of beer.

"All right," Jesse said. "All right, all right."

"And you quit going to that old Mission and listening to that religious talk."

Jesse nodded.

"I ain't living with no old religious fanatic," Cade said.

Jesse nodded again.

"And there ain't no reason we should give up drinking and all the rest of it at night."

Jesse agreed.

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"Or women," Cade said, and he fumbled now with the button of his shirt. It was such a very hot night his hand almost unconsciously pushed back the last button which had held his shirt together, exposing the section of his chest on which rested the tattooed drawing of a crouched black panther, the identical of Jesse's.

"And I don't want to hear no more about me going to work at all for a while," Cade was emphatic.

"All right, then, Cade," Jesse grinned, beginning to giggle and laugh now.

"Well I should say *all right*," Cade replied, and he smiled briefly, as he accepted Jesse's hand which Jesse proferred him then by standing up.

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Norman Podhoretz

NORMAN MAILER: THE EMBATTLED VISION

Norman Mailer is one of the few postwar American writers in whom it is possible to detect the presence of qualities that powerfully suggest a major novelist in the making. Anyone trying to describe these qualities would be likely to dwell on Mailer's extraordinary technical skill, or on the boldness and energy of his mind, or on his readiness to try something new whenever he puts pen to paper. What seems even more remarkable, however, is that his work has responded to the largest problems of this period with a directness and an assurance that we rarely find in the novels of his contemporaries. Mailer is very much an American, but he appears to be endowed with the capacity for seeing himself as a battleground of history—a capacity that is usually associated with the French and that American writers are thought never to have. He is a man given to ideologies, a holder of extreme positions, and in this too he differs from the general run of his literary contemporaries, so many of whom have fled ideology to pursue an ideal of sensible moderation both in style and philosophy. To follow Mailer's career, therefore, is to witness a special drama of development, a drama in which the deepest consciousness of the postwar period has struggled to define itself in relation to the past, and to know itself in terms of the inescapable, ineluctable present.

Now for many people the only Mailer worth considering is Mailer the realist, and for these *The Naked and the Dead* is the only one of his three novels that matters at all. It is true, I think, that Mailer's phenomenal talent for recording the precise look and feel of things is his most impressive single gift, and there is some ground for arguing that in deserting realism he has made insufficient use of this power. But it was not by arbitrary choice that Mailer abandoned

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realism, any more than it was by arbitrary choice that he wrote as a realist in the first place. Far from merely being a technique selected for its suitability to the author's talents, the realism of *The Naked and the Dead* is in itself an expression of his response to a certain structure of experience. The world of *The Naked and the Dead* is one in which a varied group of clearly defined individuals are pitted in a very direct and simple way against two allied enemies—the army and nature. Nature brings violent storms and intolerable heat, it provides jungles to be crossed and mountains to be climbed, and it also sets limits to the physical strength of the men exposed to its rigors. The army, on the other hand, is a society, tightly organized, efficiently ruled, and almost as confident of its power as nature itself. From the point of view of the individual, driven by a hunger for absolute freedom, hardly any distinction can be drawn between them. Just as nature threatens him with pain and fear and death, so the army threatens him with moral destruction, aiming finally to destroy his will altogether and reduce him to a mere servant of its own ends. To keep himself alive physically, he must be strong, resourceful, and determined; to keep himself alive spiritually, he must have enormous reserves of inner resistance.

This was an ideal situation for a writer with Mailer's natural gift of observation. Something palpable was there to describe and he described it brilliantly, down to the last quiver of a particular muscle in a man's thigh as he was climbing the face of a rock, down to the last twitch of temptation as he was saying no to an offer of promotion. The availability of a great literary tradition—a tradition which had itself developed out of just such situations in an age when society seemed as solid and substantial and unshakable as the army is in *The Naked and the Dead*—certainly helps to explain how it came about that a first novel by a young man of twenty-five should have exhibited mastery of so high an order. But there is more to the success of the best passages in *The Naked and the Dead* than a happy confrontation of talent, circumstance, and tradition. The rainstorm that descends on Anopopei shortly after the division has landed; the episode in which the platoon drags four huge guns through the muddy jungle in the black of night; the climb up Mt. Anaka—all these are so good and so moving because they are written by someone who in the deepest reaches of his being believes that the world is made up exclusively of stone walls and that life consists in a perpetual crash-

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ing of the head against them. It is as though the war provided Mailer with a never-ending succession of examples that confirmed everything he had ever felt or thought about human existence, and one can almost detect the relish with which he piled up the evidence in scene after astonishing scene.

The Naked and the Dead, however, cannot simply be read as an expression of Mailer's feelings about life in general; it also attempts to make certain specific statements about World War II, the American army, and the character of American society. In 1948 Mailer—who was shortly to become a leading figure in Henry Wallace's campaign for the Presidency—subscribed to the notion that our postwar difficulties with Russia were the sole responsibility of American capitalism. We had gone to war against Hitler not because the American ruling class was anti-fascist, but because Hitler had shown himself unwilling to play the capitalist game according to the rules, and the next step was to dispose of Russia, the only remaining obstacle on the road to total power. World War II, then, was the first phase of a more ambitious operation, while the army had been used as a laboratory of fascism, a preview of the kind of society that the American ruling class was preparing for the future. These ideas are brought into *The Naked and the Dead* in various ways. Some of them emerge from the long discussions between General Cummings (the commander of the division that has invaded the island of Anopopei) and his young aide Lt. Hearn (a rich midwesterner whose political sympathies are with the Left and whom Cummings is trying to convert to his own special brand of fascism). Another channel is supplied by the "Time Machine" flashbacks, which are there partly in order to demonstrate Mailer's contention that American society is essentially a disguised and inchoate form of the army. But it is in the main line of the plot that the politics of the novel are most heavily emphasized. The scheme of *The Naked and the Dead* is to follow a single campaign from the preparations for invasion to the mopping-up operation, and the technique is to shift back and forth between command headquarters and one small platoon in the division. This enables Mailer to observe the campaign both through the eyes of the man who is running it and in terms of the day-to-day fortunes of those who are affected in the most immediate way by his every move. The experience of the enlisted men serves throughout as an ironic commentary on the general's behavior, but the irony be-

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comes most pronounced in the last third of the novel when Cummings decides to send a patrol to the rear of the Japanese positions for the purpose of determining the feasibility of a daring new plan that he has just conceived. This decision, prompted not by the interests of victory but by vanity and opportunism, results in the death of three men and in immeasurable misery for several others—all of it wasted. Even after the Japanese have surrendered, the patrol (which has not yet heard the news) is still being dragged up Mt. Anaka, again ostensibly in the interests of victory but really in order to further the mad ambitions of the platoon sergeant, Croft.

The army, then, is evil and the individual caught in its grip has only two basic choices: he can either submit without resistance (and eventually be led into identifying himself with his persecutors) or he can try to maintain at least a minimum of spiritual independence. To be sure, there are many degrees of submission, from Stanley's abject brown-nosing to Wilson's easy-going indifference, but only one character among the enlisted men in the book is still completely unbroken by the time we come upon them: the ex-hobo Red Valsen. As for the officers, they are all (with the exception of Hearn) willing instruments of the evil power embodied in Cummings. Like Cummings and Croft, Hearn and Valsen represent the same principle on different levels of articulation and self-consciousness: they are rebels who do what they have to do but who will not permit their minds or their feelings to be drawn into collaboration with the system. The army proves too strong even for them, however, and ultimately both men are beaten down in much the same fashion.

Mailer's intentions are thus perfectly clear. Cummings and Croft exemplify the army's ruthlessness and cruelty, its fierce purposefulness and its irresistible will to power, while Hearn and Valsen together make up a picture of the rebellious individual who, for all *his* determination and courage, is finally defeated in an unequal contest. But no sooner do we become aware of this intention than we notice that there are forces at work in the novel whose effect is to subvert the general scheme. The most insidious of these, perhaps, is Mailer's tone: *The Naked and the Dead* simply does not *sound* like a book drawing up an angry indictment, though the things it says explicitly provide plenty of ground for indignation. The tone, indeed, is rather more disinterested than partisan; it is the tone of a man whose capacity for political indignation is inhibited by a keen

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sense of the world as a very complicated place, not easily to be understood by grand formulas. And the strength of this sense manifests itself unmistakably in Mailer's treatment of Valsen and Hearn, who turn out to be less sympathetic than their role in the general scheme would seem to require, just as Cummings and Croft somehow develop into more admirable figures than they were ever meant to be.

Hearn, the rich Harvard graduate, and Valsen, the penniless hobo, have a great deal in common. They are both incapable of attaching themselves to anything or anyone, and they share the nihilistic belief that "everything is crapped up, everything is phony, everything curdles when you touch it." Their rebellion against the system is sterile and ineffective, for it involves nothing more than a determination to preserve their "inviolate freedom," as Hearn puts it, "from . . . the wants and sores that caught up everybody [else]." What Mailer tells us in a key passage about Hearn is also true of Valsen: "The only thing to do is to get by on style. He had said that once, lived by it in the absence of anything else. . . . The only thing that had been important was to let no one in any ultimate issue ever violate your integrity." Style without content, a vague ideal of personal integrity, a fear of attachment, and a surly nihilistic view of the world are not enough to save a man in the long run from the likes of Cummings and Croft, and certainly not enough to endow him with heroic stature—and Mailer knows it. His desperate effort to redeem Hearn toward the end comes too late and in any case lacks conviction: perhaps the weakest passage in the whole novel is the one dealing with Hearn's decision on the night before he is killed to resign his commission and take a principled stand against everything that Cummings represents.

The same desperation shows through Mailer's effort to deflate Cummings and Croft. Like Valsen and Hearn, the platoon sergeant and the general have so much in common that they seem to be the same person in two different incarnations. They are both immensely competent; they are both very brave; they are both contemptuous of weakness; they both suffer from a sexually determined hunger to dominate. Most important of all, what they are both pursuing is the dream of absolute freedom, the dream of exercising will without obstruction or limit. Man, Cummings tells Hearn, is a being "in transit between brute and God," and his deepest urge is to "achieve God." It is this urge that drives Croft to drag the platoon up Mt. Anaka,

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just as it provokes Cummings to feats of military brilliance. But it is also what establishes the two men as the *natural* heroes of *The Naked and the Dead.* If life is truly what *The Naked and the Dead* shows it to be—a fierce battle between the individual will and all the many things that resist it—then heroism must consist in a combination of strength, courage, drive, and stamina such as Cummings and Croft exhibit and that Hearn and Valsen conspicuously lack. Moreover, Cummings and Croft are the only characters who point to anything like an adequate response to life as we see it in the novel. They are, of course, reactionaries, but they demonstrate (as reactionaries often do) the workings of the radical spirit—which is to say that the principle of their behavior is a refusal to accept the limitations inherent in any given situation as final, a refusal stemming from the conviction that the situation itself need not be regarded as final in advance. The trouble with Hearn and Valsen is their inability to transcend the terms of the given; they know perfectly well that these terms are intolerable, yet they cannot envisage any conditions other than the ones before their eyes, and therefore they are reduced to apathy, cynicism, and despair. Croft and Cummings also know that the terms are intolerable, but the knowledge acts as a stimulus to their energies and a goad to their imagination. Though the laws of nature seem to prohibit a man from climbing to the top of Mt. Anaka, Croft, who cannot bear to remain imprisoned within the boundaries of what has already been accomplished, dares to attempt the climb, while Hearn and Valsen shrug helplessly at the sight of the peaks: like liberalism itself, they lack the vision and the drive to push toward the top of the mountain. All this being the case, Mailer either had to give up his liberalism or forcibly prevent Croft and Cummings from running away with *The Naked and the Dead* altogether. Because he was not yet ready to write liberalism off and because it seemed impossible to find virtue in Cummings and Croft without also finding virtue in fascism, he had no alternative but to violate the emotional logic of his novel by destroying them as best he could. The destruction of Croft is spread thin throughout the novel, but the disposal of Cummings is only effected at the end, when Mailer contrives by a shocking twist of plot to rob him of credit for winning the campaign.

The Naked and the Dead, then, shows an exceptionally gifted young writer in the years immediately after the war discovering what

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he did not know he knew—that American liberalism is bankrupt because it cannot provide an answer to the challenge with which history has presented it. Not only does liberalism confine itself to the terms of the given at a time when there can be no hope of working within these terms, but it is animated by a vision of the world that neither calls forth heroic activity nor values the qualities of courage, daring, and will that make for the expansion of the human spirit. In the "absence of anything else," however, and out of his awareness that it was impossible to "get by on style" as so many intellectuals of his generation were trying to do, Mailer held on stubbornly to his liberal views, even as he was beginning to recognize that his real values tended in an anti-liberal direction. So little, indeed, did liberalism affect his deepest judgments that the most compassionate writing in *The Naked and the Dead* is devoted to the tribulations of the pathological anti-Semite Gallagher when he receives the news of his wife's death in childbirth. Fascist or no fascist, Gallagher is a violent, passionate man, and this was enough to turn the balance in his favor, just as the timidity and mediocrity of Roth, Wyman, and Brown are the decisive factors in the adverse judgment Mailer passes on them. Ultimately what Mailer was looking for—and has continued to look for—is not so much a more equitable world as a more exciting one, a world that produces men of size and a life of huge possibility, and this was nowhere to be found in the kind of liberalism to which he committed himself in the earliest phase of his literary career.

It is characteristic of Mailer—and, I believe, of the essence of his strength as a novelist—that he never pays much attention to intellectual fashion. In 1948, when everyone of any sophistication understood that Henry Wallace had been duped by the Communists, Mailer was campaigning vigorously for the Progressive party, and if this amounted to a confession of political naivete, it also exhibited a healthy reluctance on his part to be guided by the experience of others. He must always work everything out for himself and by himself, as though it were up to him to create the world anew over and over again in his own experience. He abandoned what was then being called "unreconstructed" liberalism only when he could see at first hand why it was wrong to support it, and even then he did so in his own good time and for his own special reasons. Certainly he

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must be the sole American example of a liberal who responded to the cold war by rushing to embrace revolutionary socialism. There was nothing "nostalgic" about Mailer's new radicalism; only a man who had been affected by Marx and Trotsky down to the very core would have been capable of writing *Barbary Shore,* and it is because he was so profoundly affected that he could blithely ignore all the good arguments against Marx and Trotsky that were in currency at the time. It would be impossible to guess from a reading of this novel that the case it constructs with such loving care had ever been challenged or refuted or in the least damaged. Nor would it be easy to guess that objective conditions played their own imperturbable part in the break-up of revolutionary socialism as an active political movement. Everything in *Barbary Shore* seems to hang on the will of the people involved, and in this sense Mailer is right to describe the book as "existentialist" in spirit.

In Marx and Trotsky, Mailer found a system that brought the courage, vision, and uncompromising determination of Cummings and Croft into the service of freedom and equality rather than class and privilege, and consequently there is no conflict between idea and feeling in *Barbary Shore* of the kind we have seen operating in *The Naked and the Dead.* But if *Barbary Shore* exhibits an almost perfect internal coherence, it also suffers from a certain straining for effect, a certain shrillness and melodramatic solemnity of tone often verging on the pretentious that contrast very sharply with the flawless pitch of *The Naked and the Dead.* The source of this trouble seems to be Mailer's unwillingness to make any use whatever of the techniques he learned to handle so well in *The Naked and the Dead* and his attempt to write in a completely new style. Here again we see him beginning from scratch, repudiating the help of his own past as vigorously as he repudiates the help of everyone else's. But there is more to Mailer's desertion of realism than that. To write realistic fiction a novelist must believe that society is what it seems to be and that it reveals the truth about itself in the personalities it throws up, the buildings it builds, the habits and manners it fosters; all the writer need do is describe these faithfully, selecting whatever details seem to him most sharply revealing and significant, and the truth will be served. But Mailer's point in *Barbary Shore* is precisely that our society is *not* what it seems to be. It seems to be prosperous, vigorous,

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sure of itself, and purposeful, whereas in fact it is apathetic, confused, inept, empty, and in the grip of invisible forces that it neither recognizes nor controls. To write about this society as though the truth of it lay embedded in its surface appearances would be to endow it with a solidity and substantiality that it simply does not possess. The only hope of making any sense of such a society is with reference to the invisible forces that work in and through it and that cannot be described but that can be talked about abstractly and pictured allegorically. In delineating the world of the cold war, then, what Mailer tries to do is convey a sense of the strangeness of the way things are and to evoke a feeling for the overpowering reality of the invisible forces that supply a key to this strangeness.

Since an extremely bad press and a climate unfavorable to political radicalism resulted in a tiny readership for *Barbary Shore,* let me summarize its plot briefly before making any further observations. Most of the action takes place in a rooming-house in Brooklyn Heights which turns out to be the refuge of a man calling himself McLeod, who—we eventually learn—had once been notorious throughout the world as the "Hangman of the Left Opposition." After breaking with the Communist party on the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact, McLeod had come to the United States to work for the State Department and had subsequently run off again, this time to devote himself to a Marxist analysis of why the revolution went wrong. An FBI agent, Hollingsworth, is also living in the rooming-house under an assumed identity, and the plot centers around his efforts to recover a mysterious "little object" which had disappeared from the State Department along with McLeod. Neither Hollingsworth nor anyone else knows what the "little object" is, but he assumes that it must be worth a fortune and is planning to steal it himself once he gets it away from McLeod. The landlady, Guinevere, a former burlesque queen secretly married to McLeod, is in league with Hollingsworth, and he also has the help of a girl named Lannie Madison who had literally been driven out of her mind by the assassination of Trotsky and who hates McLeod because he is the "undertaker of the revolution." The story is told by another tenant, Michael Lovett, a would-be novelist who is a victim of total amnesia and so can remember nothing whatever of his past but who, it develops, had been almost as deeply involved in the Trotskyite movement as

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Lannie. In the end, Lovett decides to devote his life once again to the hopes that had been shattered for him by the wartime collapse of revolutionary socialism, and this decision makes it possible for McLeod to pass the "little object" on to him instead of surrendering it to Hollingsworth, as he had finally agreed to do. In a rather hasty climax, McLeod commits suicide, Hollingsworth runs off with Guinevere before the police arrive, and Lannie is taken into custody. Lovett is left alone with McLeod's will and the "little object," charged with the responsibility of keeping the flame of "socialist culture" alive while he waits for the apocalyptic war that is inevitably to come, hoping against hope that out of the conflagration a new opportunity may arise for realizing the goals that were betrayed in the first great revolution of this century.

Barbary Shore is obviously an allegory, but of what? Most of the reviewers in 1951 took it to be an extravagant view of McCarthyism, but McCarthyism as such is actually a negligible element in the book. Mailer's real subject is the effect on modern life of the failure of the Russian revolution, and if there is an extravagant assumption at work in *Barbary Shore,* it is that *all* our difficulties (political, spiritual, psychological, and sexual) are directly traceable to this failure. "The growth of human consciousness in this century demanded—for its expanding vitality—that a revolution be made," Mailer wrote some years later, and in this sentence, I think, we have the key to *Barbary Shore.* The Russian revolution figures here not as one important historical event among many but (in the words of Lovett) as "the greatest event in man's history," the culmination of an evolutionary process dictated by the inner necessities of the human spirit. The race, in Mailer's view, must either grow into greater possibilities or retreat into less; there can be no stagnation. But the retreat into less is not merely a matter of shrinking or cowering; it involves a disruption of the whole organism, a radical dislocation—it is a disease that infects the life of individuals no less than the behavior of nations. *Barbary Shore* is an investigation of this disease, a pathology of the modern spirit.

The two characters in the book who have been most directly affected by the failure of the revolution are Lovett and Lannie. After his first political discussion with McLeod, Lovett begins to recall his days as a member of a Trotskyite study group, and he describes them in a remarkably evocative passage:

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I was young then, and no dedication could match mine. The revolution was tomorrow, and the inevitable crises of capitalism ticked away in my mind with the certainty of a time bomb, and even then could never begin to match the ticking of my pulse. . . . For a winter and a spring I lived more intensely in the past than I could ever in the present, until the sight of a policeman on his mount became the Petrograd proletariat crawling to fame between the legs of a Cossack's horse. . . . There was never a revolution to equal it, and never a city more glorious than Petrograd.

Lovett's amnesia is the consequence of the death of this passion, and its effect has been to cut him off from everything, including his own experience. He represents the modern consciousness, and the weird unfamiliar world that we see through his eyes is in fact intended as a picture of the world we all inhabit. In Lannie, we get an image of the modern consciousness in its most violently pathological aspect. The loss of hope in her case has taken the form of guilt for having presumed to think "that there was a world we could make," and her insanity consists in a total surrender to the given—submitting herself with grim enthusiasm to the brutal handling of Hollingsworth and to the bewildered narcissism of Guinevere. This surrender constitutes insanity because the given (as Lannie herself says in an extraordinary outburst to Lovett) is a world whose nature has been most sharply revealed in the Nazi death camps. What follows from the surrender, moreover, is a frantic attempt to reinterpret the moral meaning of things: "There is neither guilt nor innocence," she tells Lovett, "but there is vigor in what we do or the lack of it," and it is in Hollingsworth and Guinevere that she imagines she sees vigor. Hollingsworth she believes to be strong and purposeful, for to her he is the embodiment of those who now rule the earth, while to the raucous, grotesque, and vulgar Guinevere she makes her sick love, calling what Guinevere symbolizes good and beautiful and begging it to discover its goodness and beauty in her eyes, just as she wants only for the powerful to discover their strength in exercising it upon her.

If Lannie and Lovett together make up a picture of the modern consciousness, Guinevere and Hollingsworth must be regarded as different aspects of the disease engendered by the failure of the revolution. Nothing could be more fantastic than the way everyone takes Guinevere to be the fulfillment of his own special desires. Her vi-

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tality, however, is only superficial, the air of abundance about her is a lie, and she lacks the wherewithal to deliver on her vast promise. Given all this, I would suggest that she figures in the allegorical scheme as an image of the life outside politics, the attempt to live by and for self, the purely private life, and that she is Mailer's comment on the sorry possibilities of such a life in America today.

Hollingsworth's role is easier to formulate, since it is described explicitly by McLeod in an analysis of the forces that make the Third World War inevitable. Today, he says, "the aim of society is no longer to keep its members alive, but quite the contrary, the question is how to dispose of them." This is "the first stage of cannibalism" in a process leading inexorably to the destruction of the world, and it expresses itself initially in the rise of a class of bureaucrats who come to power "at the very moment they are in the act of destroying themselves." Far from being strong and purposeful, then, Hollingsworth is the creature of conditions he neither controls nor comprehends and the victim of inner compulsions he neither respects nor recognizes. Sick with greed and with homosexual longings, he can only find relief in outbursts of petty sadism and in the symbolic seduction of McLeod (whose crimes, Lannie declares at one point, were responsible for his very existence). Mailer, however, gives him a moment of genuine self-consciousness in which, like a character in poetic drama, he is suddenly permitted to enunciate the principle of his own being with force and conviction:

> More modesty. We ain't equipped to deal with big things. If this fellow came to me and asked my advice, I would take him aside and let him know that if he gives up the pursuits of vanity, and acts like everybody else, he'd get along better. Cause we never know what's deep down inside us . . . and it plays tricks. I don't give two cents for all your papers. A good-time Charley, that's myself, and that's why I'm smarter than the lot of you.

This is the doctrine by which the disease being investigated through Guinevere and Hollingsworth calls itself health and by which the blindness to reality that is one of its major symptoms claims the right to be known as "realism."

At the center of *Barbary Shore* stands McLeod, the incarnation of the revolutionary spirit itself. His biography amounts to a moral history of that spirit—its early achievements, its subsequent crimes, its temporary abdication, and then its agonized attempt to find new

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strength by a humble return to "theory." The "little object" that McLeod has stolen from the State Department is never identified, but we can be fairly confident in thinking of it as Hope or Dedication or Vision or a "coagulation" of all three—the loss of it is what accounts for the gradual and subtle derangement of the system and the possession of it by this lone individual entails the most fearful of responsibilities. Vision and hope and dedication, at any rate, are the qualities that separate McLeod from all the other characters and that finally enable him to jolt Lovett out of his stupor and to win the support of Lannie. By the rigorous terms set up in *Barbary Shore* he points to the only possible course left to the modern consciousness —which is to hold on with all its might to the "little object" while crying a plague on both your houses to the two contending powers in the cold war who are irrevocably committed to the cause of death. The heritage McLeod passes on is a feeble thing, but it means feeling for Lovett where there was apathy before and relatedness where there was absolute isolation.

What it meant for Mailer, however, was another matter entirely, since the grand heroic life he was looking for could no more be found in revolutionary socialism than in liberalism. If the one is bankrupt in drive, vision, and imagination, the other is dead in practice, frozen in outworn categories, and cut off from the living realities of the present. Several years after the appearance of *Barbary Shore* Mailer declared (in replying to Jean Malaquais' attack on his *Dissent* article "The White Negro") that Marxism had failed in application because it was "an expression of the scientific narcissism we inherited from the nineteenth century" and motivated by "the rational mania that consciousness could stifle instinct." One might almost take this as a criticism of the cold, tense, claustrophobic brilliance of *Barbary Shore* itself; and indeed, Mailer's abandonment of revolutionary socialism in favor of the point of view he calls "Hip" was as much a repudiation of ideological thinking in general as of Marx and Trotsky in particular. Here again we have an example of the curious relation to intellectual fashion that appears to mark the movements of Mailer's mind. Just as he remained untouched by all the sophisticated arguments against "unreconstructed" liberalism that were circulating so energetically through the intellectual atmosphere of 1948 until he had discovered their truth for himself and in his own good

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time, so he had to go through a period of revolutionary fervor and ideological rigidity before beginning to yearn (as so many former radicals had done before him) for a breath of fresh air and a supple, open-ended point of view. Unlike the great majority of his literary contemporaries, who knew all about the deleterious effects of ideological commitment without ever having tasted the accompanying passion, Mailer was able to experience both the passion and the rigidity on his own pulses, and when he finally turned against ideology it was with the roar of a man betrayed, not with the complacency of the wise at one remove. And again—as in the case of his shift from liberalism to revolutionary socialism—he followed a wholly unexpected path in making his escape from the constrictions of ideological commitment.

In the Hipster (whom he calls the American existentialist) Mailer believes he has found an effective mode of rebellion against the terms of the given neatly combined with the flexibility and openness to life that were lacking in revolutionary socialism. In contrast to Lovett—who had nothing to do once he accepted the "little object" from McLeod but drift from one back alley to another while waiting for the apocalypse to come—the Hipster has developed a strategy for living fully and intensively in the present. He too refuses to have any truck with the world around him and he too recognizes that collective death is the goal toward which our society is moving, but he differs from Lovett in the further refusal to pin his hopes on the future. Having no future, he cares nothing for the past and therefore he is totally consigned to the fluctuating dimensions of the "enormous present." In effect, the Hipster as Mailer describes him in "The White Negro" is a man who follows out the logic of the situation in which we are all presumably caught: a man who, faced with the threat of imminent extinction and unwilling to be a party to the forces pushing toward collective death, has the courage to make a life for himself in the only way that conditions permit—by pursuing the immediate gratification of his strongest desires at every moment and by any means.

The full consequences of this new position for Mailer's work are yet to emerge, but several results have already become visible in *The Deer Park*—which, though written before "The White Negro," belongs to Mailer's Hip phase—and in the completed sections of the ambitious novel on which he is currently engaged. The most impor-

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tant consequence, perhaps, is that Hip, with its "burning consciousness of the present" and the "terribly charged" quality of experience it involves, has allowed Mailer to make a more intensive use of his great powers of observation than he has done since *The Naked and the Dead*. Whereas *Barbary Shore* seems to have been produced by a mind shut in upon itself and glowing with the febrile intensity of a lonely intellectual passion (it is a book such as might have been written by one of those brooding, distracted students who haunt the pages of Russian literature), *The Deer Park* exhibits a newly liberated capacity for sheer relish in the look and feel and sound of things. Mailer is now back in the world that he deserted in *Barbary Shore,* though it is by no means the same world that he evoked in *The Naked and the Dead*. What he sees in Hollywood is the image of a society that has reached the end of its historical term, a society caught between the values of an age not quite dead and those of a new era that may never crawl its way out of the womb. The defining characteristic of such a society is a blatant discrepancy between the realities of experience and the categories by which experience is still being interpreted—a discrepancy that can make simultaneously for comedy and horror. The reality is that the scruples, inhibitions, and conventions which were once effective in restraining the natural egoism of the individual no longer work very well because the values from which they drew their strength no longer command much respect. No one, however, is willing to admit this, and they all go on talking and sometimes acting as though what they "really" wanted were the things that people used to want when their basic psychological drives were still roughly in harmony with their professed values—when, that is, these values were powerful enough to create internal needs that became almost as pressing as the primary needs themselves. This situation reveals itself in every department of life, but it is in sex that its contours are most clearly defined, and therefore it is on the sexual affairs of his characters that Mailer concentrates in *The Deer Park*. What he gives us is a remarkable picture of people saddled with all the rhetoric of the monogamous while acting like some primitive tribe that has never heard of monogamy and is utterly bewildered by the moral structure on which this strange institution rests. It is a world of people who talk incessantly about being in love and craving "decent, mature relationships" but who are in fact tightly imprisoned in their own egos and who have no

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true interest in anything but self. For them sex has become a testing-ground of the self: they rate one another on their abilities in bed, and the reward of making love is not so much erotic satisfaction or spiritual intimacy as a sense of triumph at being considered "good." Mailer's attitude toward all this—I mean the attitude built into his tone and his emphases—is very tricky. There is an unmistakable note of shocked disapproval at many of the things he is describing, yet he insists on treating them with the respect due a major fact of experience. What follows from that respect is a highly disciplined refusal to dismiss the "decadent" narcissistic sexuality of his characters either as immoral or (what comes to the same thing) immature, either as sinful or unhealthy. It would be difficult to exaggerate the originality of this approach, for it is almost impossible to think of another serious American novelist who has even so much as attempted to study contemporary sexual life on its own terms, let alone one who has brought to the subject anything resembling Mailer's readiness to find the organizing principle, the principle of meaning, that may be implicit in these terms.

The Deer Park takes place largely in Desert d'Or, the favorite resort of the Hollywood movie colony, and it centers mainly on Charles Francis Eitel, a famous and very talented director who has been blacklisted for refusing to cooperate with a Congressional investigating committee and who, after holding out for a whole year against all the pressure to capitulate, finally collapses and gives in. This, of course, is the standard Mailer situation—the rebellious individual crushed by the powers that be—but we do not have to read very far into the novel before we realize that Mailer's view of the nature of the conflict has changed considerably since *The Naked and the Dead*. Hearn and Valsen were defeated in a contest against a hopelessly strong adversary; it is not, however, the strength of his adversaries that defeats Eitel. The two producers Teppis and Munshin are formidable enough in their own way but they are also—what Cummings and Croft could never be—figures of comedy and objects of ridicule. For the first time in Mailer, then, victory over the system has become possible to those who can see through it and who are sufficiently brave to act on what they see. Eitel, a sensitive and intelligent man, understands the secret of the system quite as well as the two characters in the novel who succeed in overcoming it—the narrator Sergius and the diabolical young pimp Marion Faye—but he

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fails because he lacks the courage to disregard "all the power of good manners, good morals, the fear of germs, and the sense of sin," and to turn himself into a complete and ruthless egoist.

Sergius and Marion are thus the natural heroes of the world of *The Deer Park,* as Cummings and Croft were the natural heroes of *The Naked and the Dead,* and since Mailer is aware of this, there is no need for him to wrench our sympathies in a direction that the novel itself refuses to support. He does, however, make several positive assertions about Sergius and Marion that are as unwarranted aesthetically as the negative assertions made in *The Naked and the Dead* about Cummings and Croft. It is impossible, for example, to believe that the Sergius we see moving around in *The Deer Park* could ever have developed into the author of this novel.* Not only is he simple-minded, unimaginative, affected, and basically sentimental, but (what is perhaps more to the point) utterly dismissing in his view of other people. When Eitel, who has been his good friend, finally capitulates to Teppis and Munshin and the Committee, Sergius cuts him off brutally—he has failed and is therefore entitled to no further consideration. There is no question that this is the final judgment Mailer himself passes on Eitel, but it is only a final judgment and it is qualified and complicated by the rich, full picture we get of the process that brought Eitel to the painfully sorry pass in which we see him in the last chapter of the novel. Now it is hard to credit that the man who could respond so insensitively to his friend's failure would ever have been able to summon up the subtlety and the insight to understand how a failure of this sort comes about. Nor could such a man conceivably have produced the account of Eitel's affair with Elena, where every nuance in the progress of a vastly complicated relationship is registered with a delicacy and a precision that recall Proust himself. He would also have been incapable of the brilliant comic portraits of Munshin and Teppis, which are so good precisely because they are *not* dismissing—Mailer devastates the two producers while allowing them their full due. Nothing we see of Sergius in the novel could explain how he might have come to compose the marvellous letter of self-justification that the drunken Elena sends

* To forestall the obvious objection, I ought to explain that Sergius's role as narrator is comparable not to Nick Carraway's in *The Great Gatsby* but to Marcel's in Proust. Moreover, he is an active character in the story, one of whose purposes is to explain why he rather than Eitel must be considered the true artist.

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to Eitel after she has gone to live with Marion—that letter in which a girl who has been universally snubbed and patronized because of her social crudity suddenly bursts forth with astonishing power as a woman of feeling and perception.

But if Sergius could not conceivably be the author of *The Deer Park,* Eitel very easily could; what Mailer has done here is to endow Sergius with Eitel's sensibility, just as he tries to endow Marion's nihilism with grandiose theological significance. The reason, I think, can be found in "The White Negro," where Mailer tells us that the nihilism of the Hipster is really a creative force. In Hip "incompatibles have come to bed, the inner life and the violent life, the orgy and the dream of love, the desire to murder and the desire to create." Yet the curious thing is that the Hipster who "lives out, acts out, follows the close call of his instinct as far as he dares," who is the herald of a revolution moving "backward toward being and the secrets of human energy," and whose subversiveness takes the form of a constant pursuit of immediate gratification—the curious thing is that this "adventurer" of the night is deeply suspicious of feeling and mortally afraid of passion. The nihilism of Marion Faye, for example, amounts to a rebellion *against* feeling, a kind of Nietzschean repudiation of his "civilized" or Christian self. Everything he does is done precisely because it is repugnant to him, and he believes that "there is no pleasure greater than that obtained from a conquered repugnance." He is not naturally cruel and therefore he forces himself to be hideously cruel; he is not naturally vicious and therefore he cultivates the vices with the grimness of a hermit scourging himself in the desert. Similarly with Sergius, who bends all his efforts toward the perfection of a style based on the suppression of spontaneous feeling: above all he wants to be *cool.*

The irony is that with Sergius and Marion we are back again to Hearn—and he is still trying to get by on style and an ideal of personal integrity. It is much the same style and derives from much the same source (the unavailability of radical political solutions), but in the rank atmosphere of cold-war stalemate it has grown and matured and begun to mistake itself for a portentously weighty philosophy. At the time of the Korean war, when the apocalypse seemed about to descend at any moment, Hearn (who had been killed off in *The Naked and the Dead* before his newly formed resolve to throw off his surly nihilism could be tested) reappeared in *Barbary Shore*

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split into the amnesiac Lovett and the madwoman Lannie. The loss of the political faith that would have sustained him in the 30's was now seen by Mailer as worse than simply a sign of spiritual inadequacy—it was a sickness of the mind and a disease of the soul. But his brave attempt to recapture that faith proved to be only a dramatic gesture in the face of a dramatic situation; when the situation lost its drama and settled into the dull round of aimless anxiety that has marked the Eisenhower years, the gesture lost its air of glory, as all apocalyptic gestures inevitably do when the apocalypse itself takes too long in coming. Under these circumstances, Mailer turned back to the old Hearn and began to cast about for hidden resources of creativity where before he had seen only the emptiness of mere style, and for stature where before he had perceived only a well-intentioned mediocrity. In identifying himself finally with Hearn, he has in effect acknowledged his kinship to the intellectuals of his own generation—that generation of whose failings he has always been the most intransigent critic and whose qualities he has always tried so hard to extirpate from his own character. His espousal of Hip indicates that he is still trying—for what else is Hip as he defines it but a means of turning away in despair (as most of his contemporaries have done) from the problems of the world and focusing all one's attention on the problems of the self without admitting that this must automatically entail a shrinking of horizons, a contraction of the sense of possibility, a loss of imaginative freedom?

One can only sympathize with Mailer's latest effort to maintain a sense of huge possibility, even if one is totally out of sympathy with some of the doctrines he has recently been preaching. In my opinion, his great mistake is to attribute direction and purpose to the Hipster (and I think that the weakness of Sergius and Marion as imaginative creations indicates that the novelist in Mailer is once again resisting the commands of the theoretician). Hipsterism, it seems to me, is a symptom and not a significant protest, a spasmodic rather than an organized response. The Hipster is the product of a culture (exemplified beautifully in the Hollywood of *The Deer Park*) whose official values no longer carry any moral authority, and he reacts to the hypocrisy, the lying, and the self-deception that have contaminated the American air during the cold-war period by withdrawing into a private world of his own where everything, including language, is stripped down to what he considers the reliable essentials. To this

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extent, his response to the America of Eisenhower bears a certain resemblance to Hemingway's response to the America of Woodrow Wilson. As many critics have pointed out, Hemingway's prose was generated by the wish to liberate language from the fine lying rhetoric in which Wilsonian idealism had cloaked the horrid realities of the First World War; like the personal style Hemingway elaborated in his stories—the code of courage and craft in the face of a constantly threatening universe—the prose style itself was the expression of an effort to establish a truth of human experience that would be proof against the distorting encrustations of "culture" and "civilization," a truth (as it were) of the state of nature, a truth at rock-bottom. But the difference between Hemingway and the Hipster is the difference between mastering a bad situation and being victimized by it, between exercising intelligence, sensibility, and discipline in order to overcome the rot of history and seizing upon the rot of history as an excuse for resigning from the painful responsibility to exercise the mind at all.

If it is true that Mailer has been reading things into Hip that are simply not there—and just those things that Hip would need to satisfy his demand for size and importance and a sense of huge possibility—then we can be fairly certain that sooner or later his restless imagination will light out for some other territory. Indeed, he has already shown signs of an impulse to drop his original emphasis on the political significance of Hip in favor of what he takes to be its theological implications. The idea, apparently, is that God is "no longer" omnipotent and therefore needs the help of man to fulfill the "enormous destiny" with which He has been charged (by whom Mailer does not say). Here is how he put it spontaneously to an interviewer:

> . . . I think that the particular God we can conceive of is a god whose relationship to the universe we cannot divine; that is, how enormous He is in the scheme of the universe we can't begin to say. But almost certainly, He is not all-powerful; He exists as a warring element in a divided universe, and we are a part of—perhaps the most important part —of His great expression, His enormous destiny; perhaps He is trying to impose upon the universe His conception of being against other conceptions of being very much opposed to His. Maybe we are in a sense the seed, the seed-carriers, the voyagers, the explorers, the embodiment

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of that embattled vision; maybe we are engaged in a heroic activity, and not a mean one. . . .

The attraction of this astonishing collection of ancient Christian heresies for Mailer comes out explicitly a little later in the interview:

This involves new moral complexities which I feel are far more interesting than anything the novel has gotten into yet. It opens the possibility that the novel, along with many other art forms, may be growing into something larger rather than something smaller, and the sickness of our times for me has been just this damn thing that everything has been getting smaller and smaller and less and less important, that the romantic spirit has dried up. . . . We're all getting so mean and small and petty and ridiculous, and we all live under the threat of extermination. . . .

We get some notion of what Mailer means by these "new moral complexities" from the prologue to his novel-in-progress which was published in the Fall 1958 issue of *Partisan Review* under the title "Advertisements for Myself on the Way Out." The reader, he announces, must be prepared "for a dissection of the extreme, the obscene and the unsayable" in this "tale of heroes and villains, murderers and suicide, orgy-masters, perverts, and passionate lovers," and it is abundantly clear that the exploration of these "mysteries" is to be made without the help of any traditional moral assumptions. Murder is not necessarily to be regarded as evil, perversion is not necessarily to be considered perverse, suicide is not necessarily to be looked upon as an act of simple self-destruction, and so on. We can now only wait to see what comes of all this, and Mailer being so unpredictable a writer, the one safe guess we can make is that it will turn out to be very different from what many readers of "Advertisements" have assumed—very different and very much more exciting than most of the fiction that is being produced by most of the other novelists of his sorely beleaguered generation.

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Robert Penn Warren

LOVE AND DEATH IN JOHNTOWN, TENN.*

Old Jack Harrick, a big grizzled heavy-headed old man, ruined and beautiful, is sitting in a wheel chair, dying of cancer. At this moment he is wondering if he smells. There is no reason to think that he does, but he is wondering. He is wondering this because his wife has just been in to speak to him, to bring him iced tea against the hot June afternoon, and to lay her cheek against his, and say, "John T.—dear John T." Perhaps he would be happy, he thinks, if he did smell, but he does not know why he might be happy if he could think she got his stink, which is not there anyway.

Now he thinks about dying, and how the body is nothing. It is a hunk of filth and they fling it into a hole. But if he got to smelling first and before they had any right to fling him in, that would fix them. It would serve them right.

Then his eyes fill with tears, the terrible tears of an old man, yet strong. He looks out the window. There is the white oak in the yard, the remnants of rope yet hanging from it where he once put up a swing for his boy. How long did it take a piece of rope—good rope—to rot? There is the flower bed where his wife's nasturtiums shine yellow and red beyond the uncut lawn this side of the paling fence. He wishes he had fixed the fence, like she had asked him.

He begins to pray again. What he sees out the window, tree, rope, fence, flowers—all swim in bright tears. He does not want to smell. He wishes he had fixed the fence. He prays, but the words mean nothing. He is simply saying over and over the grace his wife

* This is an excerpt from Robert Penn Warren's forthcoming novel, *The Cave*, which will be published by Random House. *Copyright ©1959 by Robert Penn Warren.*

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had taught the children, long back: *God is great, God is good, make us thankful for this food.* His tears stop. He reaches down and lays his right hand on his genitals.

Old Jack Harrick, who had helled over half the ridges and up half the hoot owl hollows from Chattanooga to Nashville and as far over as Abingdon, Virginia, sits in the wheel chair. For nigh forty years Old Jack had dragged jugs dry, whipped his box till folks fell down from dancing, cracked jaws with his fist like hickory nuts under a claw-hammer, and tore off drawers like a high wind in October stripping a sycamore to bare-white, all over Kobeck County, counties adjacent and contiguous, and other points of the compass wherever a farm wasn't too perpendicular or a cross-roads store too cant-wise to allow a fellow foothold for one punch to the head, or wherever there was enough shade-privacy for a maiden's shame-fun, enough grass so gravel wouldn't put a crick in a lady's backbone, and ground wasn't so tilted you didn't have to use one hand to hold on to a sapling to keep from rolling downhill to the settlement and advertise fame, envy, and consternation before you could get unclamped. Not that a little tilt, as the old folks reported Old Jack to have said when young, didn't spice sport, and they reported that after a certain set-to the boys found what had been good pasture-grass and clover looking for fifteen feet like where oxen had passed dragging a log from logging operations.

That was the way the old ones talked, dreaming back, the ones left, especially Old Jim Duckett, back-broke, butt-sprung, and gut-shot, smelling of corn likker, ambeer streaked down his whiskers, no good and never had been, sitting in front of the harness shop, in the shade, reaching out to snag the Harrick boy by the sleeve, saying: "Durn, if you ain't Ole Jack Harrick's boy—Boy, you made like him?"

Then *hee-heeing* in an awful old-man snicker, before launching into the praise that somehow was intended to make the praiser the peer of the praised: "Yeah, Ole Jack, he was a heller. He was ring-tail. Hard-working between times and made that anvil sing, but when he tuk over the ridge, he was shore Hell's own unquenchable boy-chap—yeah, a pearl-handle .38 in his hip-pocket, and one button of his fly unbuttoned to save time and didn't give a durn which he might git aggervated to use fust, pistol or pecker. I'm a-telling you,

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strong men, when they met him, they give him the high side of a hill track and fust on the creek-log, and warn't no woman under age fer putting on the calico cap didn't swaller sweet spit and look back over her shouder when she passed him on the big road, her married or not, and hit Sunday.—Yeah, you Ole Jack's boy?"

And the old fingers would, with an obscure feebleness, pinch his thigh through the blue-jeans, and the whiskered baby-pink lips would peel back from the yellow teeth: "Yeah, a chip off the ole block—hee-hee!"

But up in his sprawling log house, in the glade, among the big cedars that had been big when the first Harrick axe rang there a hundred and fifty years back, now Old Jack Harrick, old heller of high coves and hoot-owl hollows, cancer-bit and time-tricked now, sat in his wheel chair and stared out the window at the big white oak and the piece of rotting rope, at the red and yellow nasturtiums, yellow and jim-crack as the toy counter of a dime store, and at the fence, and felt sorry that he had not replaced the bad palings, the way his wife had asked him, and tears came into his eyes. For he loved his wife.

That was the awful thing, he loved her right now, as she set the glass of iced tea on the little table beside him and laid her cheek against his hair, and murmured his name. God damn it, why did she have to do that now, for he could love her a lot easier if she didn't. It would be a lot easier to love her if she were dead and six feet under like some of those other round-bottomed contraptions that he hadn't loved but had shore-God taught the meaning of the word to so they could spell it backwards and forwards for anybody's benefit afterwards, including their own, and had something to remember and think on in the long dark nights in the graveyard.

It would be a lot easier to love Celia Hornby Harrick if everything, and all the honest work he had done on her in a love-way, were all tidy and tied up in a package for good and the lid clamped down.

But no, God damn it, she had to be alive. She had to put her cheek against his hair. And not only alive but nigh thirty years younger than he, than Old Jack Harrick, the cancer-bit heller and beauty-boy of the wheel chair. Right now, as she leaned her cheek against his chair, he couldn't bear to look round at her. If he did

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he would see a woman who didn't even look her years and tears and time, just a little gray in the yellow hair, like it wasn't gray but the light just struck it slantwise to silver, and some pink left in her cheeks, if her blood got up, and her breath sweet-smelling enough, and her body, you get her stripped down and the light gentle, shaped all ripe and ready for hand-holt.

Thinking that way, he was suddenly blind-mad like he had caught somebody peeking on his wife, on Celia Hornby Harrick, on Mrs. John T. Harrick, and her getting ready for bed or bath tub, and his hands clenched tight like he would break the bastard's back, like a piece of too-long kindling over his knee. But there wasn't any bastard peeking out of the dark under the old green window shade. It was just himself, and he was sick at the thought.

If only she were dead, then everything would be as it had been and not as it was now, and he would not be like an old tramp sneaking up in the dark cold night to a crack in a window to peek in. He would be for always the man who lived in that house. He would lock the kitchen door, and bank the fire in the cook-stove so she wouldn't have any trouble in the morning—oh, yeah, he always was careful to make things easy for her, and he knew all about fires, being the best blacksmith between Blue Ridge and Rocky Mountains—and wind the kitchen clock, and get himself a drag of buttermilk out of the ice-box to sweeten his digestion, and go down the hall toward the bedroom.

He would stop just outside the door, and smile to himself in the dark. Standing in the dark hall he had always been able to see it so well, in his head. He wouldn't have to peek. He had done his peeking long back. He would know now she was putting on her nightgown, standing with her arms over her head for a second with that position lifting her whole body up like it was a Christmas present and glad to be one, letting the gown slip down over her arms, then over her, and her head coming through the collar.

It would be a flannel nightgown, white with tiny little blue flowers, or some such thing, and it would reach nigh the floor so you couldn't see her feet. The collar would be sort of high, and after it got settled down over her head she would tie the little white, or maybe blue, ribbon that closed the collar. Standing there in the dark hall, he could see how she would tie that little ribbon, how her lips

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would purse a little, the way women's lips purse when they do a little something. He would grin to himself in the dark, thinking how she was tying that ribbon. He always waited till he was sure she had tied it. For he wanted it tied for him to untie.

Then he would come in the door, and she would look up at him over the ribbon, for a split second like he had surprised her. Then her smile would begin, and for another split second it always looked like the smile of a little girl who didn't know what the world was like but loved it all because it was so dew-bright and sweet-smelling. Then that little-girl smile, which was as teeter-y and shy as a lady-wren balanced on a bent stalk of wild parsnip, and which a thousand years ago when she wasn't much more than a little girl was what he had first noticed about Celia Hornby, would be gone. It would be changed into another kind of smile, the smile of Celia Hornby Harrick, a grown woman standing very still in a blue-flowered night-gown, who might not know all about the world but didn't have to, and didn't want to, because she knew quite a lot about Jack Harrick in general and what he had in mind in particular, for her health, benefit, and instruction, and standing there with the ribbon tied prim under her chin, she didn't mind a bit. She didn't mind, that is, unless one of the young ones was croupy or something, or it was a season with money tight and grub scant.

But he knew, too, what worriment could be, and how it could put a big black hole right in the middle where a man's thinking and feeling ought to be, and you felt like you were going to fall into the hole, forever into black nothing. And he knew that worriment could come with no reason at all you could figure—just something that came when it looked like a time of rejoicing.

The time of his own big worriment had come like that, right when you would have thought jubilation at hand. His first child, the boy, was just born, and him nigh fifty and hale as hickory, but as soon as that boy drew breath, he, Jack Harrick, had just run off wild and blind to Chattanooga to catch the clap and get his head bloodied with a cop's night-stick, and wind up in jail. It was all a mystery, how it came on him.

But it wasn't too much of a mystery what pulled him back into shape. It was loving Celia Hornby Harrick, who forgave him. No, she hadn't forgiven him. She hadn't had to. She had simply fallen on her knees beside the chair he sank into, and hugged his knees and

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closed her eyes and lifted up her head and, weeping, had cried out: "Dear God, I thank Thee, for Thou hast brought back to me what is dearest to my heart."

That was enough, he reckoned, to sort of bust something in any man, especially when six weeks of likker has gone bad on your stomach and you've got the clap and the place on your head isn't yet healed where they clubbed you and you've been thrown in jail like a hog in a pen and you're fifty years old and your name's been in the paper to do you no credit. It had busted something in him, all right—the way she thanked God for him coming back. So he had joined the Baptist Church of Johntown, Tennessee, and been baptized in Elk Creek, in the big still pool below where the creek came boiling white over the gray limestone. He had been dunked good.

Then the preacher had lifted him up into sunlight. The ladies' choir, ranged on the limestone shelf above the pool, under the shadow of gray bluff and the dappling green glimmer of June leafage, was singing "Bringing in the Sheaves." The Reverend MacCarland Sumpter lifted up his hand in blessing. Celia Hornby Harrick, with tears running down her cheeks and eyes bright blue as glory, threw her arms around his body and pressed her face against his chest, no matter if he was sopping wet and all Johntown goggle-eyed. And he stood there, with water squishing in his shoes as he shifted his weight from side to side, and patted her on the head, saying, "Baby—now Honey-Baby—don't take on, Baby."

He was glad he had been dunked good and well. With all that water coming out of his thick head of hair, folks couldn't tell whether it was creek water or tears running down his own cheeks, as he stood there patting the head of Celia Hornby Harrick.

He reckoned that the preacher, knowing all he did about him, had to give him a little deeper dunking than the ordinary sinner needed. Once, meeting the preacher on the street, he even had the impulse to tell him the joke. But, giving the preacher's face a preliminary survey, he decided against it. He reckoned it was a sort of pride, just plain ornery human man-pride in sinfulness, that made him want to tell the joke in the first place. So he made another joke to himself. He reckoned since even if he was saved he still had such a bait of sin-pride, he might take longer than most to build up saint-pride.

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Then, grinning to himself, he reckoned maybe it might take him less time if he was naturally just proud as pus, and all his pride had to do was just switch sides from Old Nick to God-All-Mighty and never miss beat or breakfast in the process. Maybe he ought to get dunked again, he thought. No, maybe Elk Creek wasn't enough! Maybe they'd have to put him in a big wash kettle and build a fire under it and render the pride out like fat for making soap.

Jack Harrick might make jokes secretly to and about himself and his salvation, but nobody else did. No doubt, some of the unregenerate made such jokes, but they were made in scrupulous privacy. Jack Harrick might be fifty years old and have a skull cracked by a cop's night-stick, but when he walked down the street nobody mentioned either Chattanooga or Jesus Christ, either baptizing or bottle-fighting. Anybody who thought up a good joke, and thought he might spring it the next time Jack Harrick walked down the street, could just listen for a second to the song that anvil was singing in the heat of a summer afternoon, way over yonder on the other side of town, and dream up a mode of entertainment that might cost his insurance company less. Yes, the Baptists believed that once in Grace always in Grace, but nobody wanted to push Jack Harrick too far to find out if he had really been in Grace at the time of his dunking. His daily progress down the street of Johntown was greeted by respectful salutation or awe-struck silence.

So whatever worriment had driven him off to Chattanooga that time had long since been washed away in the waters of Elk Creek. He knew enough, however, about worriment, and what worriment might do to dry up your juices, to respect Celia Hornby Harrick's occasional worriments over croup or short cash when he would come in the bedroom door and find her standing in her nightgown and the smile didn't come. Or tried to come, and couldn't quite make it.

No, it wasn't just her worriments he had had to respect. There was something else in her. There were just certain things you felt you couldn't do to Celia Hornby Harrick—even back yonder when she was just Celia Hornby not a deal more than twenty years old and teaching the Third Grade and herself looking like the well-developed pride of the Eighth Grade, or of the whole durn school for that matter and his money. There had been times when he had had Celia Hornby out in the dark in dogwood time, and the peepers

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down in the valley had been opening and closing those squeaky silver hinges. He hadn't crowded her, even if he did guess she had kind thoughts and curious curiosities about Jack Harrick.

If she didn't have very kind thoughts and specially curious curiosities, why was she here and not off with some snot-nose watching the feature showing Lassie the Dog We Love or in a Chevrolet with the feature showing Snot-Nose Tries to Come of Age? Why wasn't she in the Chevrolet with Snot-Nose, whom any healthy girl of 110 pounds could keep out of the bureau of vital statistics with her left hand, and not spooking along in the dark under the dogwoods, with nobody to yell to if your foot slipped, spooking along beside a man old as your father and one who by public report had never fought in the Snot-Nose class since he took off short pants?

There was only one answer, as Jack Harrick, nigh breaking fifty but not yet Old Jack, said to himself under the dogwood darkness. A girl didn't go out with a man of that age, pride, and reputation unless she harbored kind thoughts, even if the man didn't look fifteen years of his age, didn't have more gray hairs in his black sideburns than you could count on your fingers, two hands to the side to be fair, and, if he did have a little more girth than once, still had a belly flat as a washboard and with corrugations hard enough to scrub clothes on.

Jack Harrick sucked his belly in as he walked beside her in the dark, and felt pretty good. He knew things were going to roll his way. But there was something about that Celia Hornby you had to respect. He reckoned it was because she was sure of herself. He could never abide a man who wasn't sure of himself, but had never had to give the topic a thought in so far as women were concerned, for simple instinct had led him to close in fast on those that weren't sure. He didn't have any impulse to close in fast on Celia Hornby. He never crowded her, even when she breathed shallow.

He walked along, with his gut sucked in, and felt twenty-five years old, which he reckoned was a man's best time for performance in most lines of worthwhile endeavor even if by then a man hasn't had time to build a universal reputation to bask in between efforts. They were moving quiet as a dream together on the soft grass by the dogwoods, in the dark. They were dreaming the same dream no doubt, but not dreaming it in the head, just letting their bodies dream

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it until their bodies felt so light and drifty they didn't feel like bodies at all, and wouldn't until the dream suddenly came true. But it didn't come true that way. And it wasn't because of that self-sureness she had. Or because of the respect, or whatever it was she inspired. It was because of something that happened inside of Jack Harrick.

He was drifting along in that communal dream, sucking his guts in and feeling better than he ever had in his life. As his body was dreaming that communal dream, the bodies drifted along with considerable space between them. His left hand reached out in the dark to hold her hand. They weren't even looking at each other, drifting along. His hand held hers very lightly, just barely holding, aware of its softness in his, of its smallness but good strength.

Occasionally he would put the slightest pressure on her hand, not looking, and then wait for an answering pressure. He figured that there was an answering pressure, but always after he had let up and so slight you couldn't be really sure there had been anything at all. She could certainly micrometer that pressure down till it would take a jewelry store scales to tell it. So he tried cutting his down, down to the barest, the barest you could with a hand like his.

So they drifted along, playing that game in their dream, and his mind went emptier and emptier as the dream grew and seemed not only to fill up his body, but the dark trees and the dark, barely star-teased sky above the trees, and included not only now, this minute, but all the times he had ever lived and walked in the dark. He found himself sucking his guts tighter and tighter and wasn't even sure he felt the soft sod under his feet. Then clear as a bell, a voice seemed to say in his head: *I'm not ever going to die.*

That was a moment of perfect joy. He had found the great secret that everybody had always hunted for. He, Jack Harrick, had found it. Then, suddenly, he didn't know whose hand it was he held.

That was absolute terror, like waking up in the dark and not knowing who you are. Yet he was afraid to turn his head and find out who was there, and therefore who he himself was. His head spun, as in a kind of vertigo of all the past times he had walked in the dark. He was afraid that if he turned his head he might find nobody, nothing there at all, nothing because everything, all the past there, which was nothing, nothing but whirling blankness. This moment was only a dream of the past, and it was about to whirl away

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into the dark and he would be alone on a mountainside, in the night shadow of trees, with the last dogwood petals about to drop in the dark. He was shaking, like malaria in dog days and the quinine not taking hold.

Then he felt the pressure on his hand.

Thinking about it afterwards, many nights, lying in the dark with Celia Hornby's head on his arm and her sleep-breath gentle and steady, he figured that in that instant of terror his hand must have tightened on her hand, not playing the dream-game any more, just twitching like a frog leg dropped in the hot fry-fat in the skillet. And the girl, not knowing the reason why his grip came suddenly stronger, must have come back herself with just a little more juice.

Why wouldn't she have come back with a little more juice? If she was drifting along in the dream-game, feeling the dream grow? She couldn't know, he was damned glad to reflect, that he had been hit like a field mouse by a hoot-owl and snatched into the dark sky. He was ashamed, plain puke-ashamed sometimes lying in his bed, to remember how he had been snatched, like he wasn't a man sure of himself. It was a comfort, particularly since she had that self-sureness, drifting along in her own sure dream, that she couldn't have known what was happening to him when she came back a little stronger.

Or had she? Had she really come back stronger? Or come back at all? It was a long time, many nights of figuring, before that doubt struck him. Perhaps in that moment of terror and disorientation on the mountain he had had to have the feeling that whatever and whoever's hand was there was holding on to him. Now he had to grant the possibility that then he had needed to think so whether it was true or not, and granting it, didn't know quite what to make of it. Did it make his shame at weakness greater or less?

He always decided that maybe that didn't matter too much. Anyway, supposing she hadn't come back at all that time when his hand had gripped hers, not knowing whose hand it was, she had come back plenty since. He reckoned he was on firm ground there, and by God, it was ground he himself, and no other God-durn man, had bought and paid for, cleared, broke, seeded, weeded, laid by, and brought to harvest.

Yes, on the whole, he figured he had no gripe about the way the

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cards had fallen. But he still hadn't been able to figure out the reason they fell the way they did that night on the mountain. When her fingers had returned the pressure—or when, in his need, he had thought they did—he had turned toward her, and grabbed her hand in both of his, and fallen right on his knees in the dark, on the soft grass, under the dogwoods. Yes, right on his knees, in the way they said fellows used to propose, the way they showed it in cartoons and in the funny-paper, some simp kneeling down and an expression on his face like waiting for castor oil to show the first signs. Long later, thinking about it, he had had to grin in the dark, at his own expense and the strangeness of it, to think of Jack Harrick coming down on his knees like a stunned beef.

But the funniest part was that when he swung around and grabbed her hand with both his and cried out and fell to his knees like the stunned beef, he still didn't really know what woman it was he was falling down to. It was a light-colored shape there in the woods-dark, real, yes, but which shape, with what color eyes and waist-feel and name and address, he would have had to be damned from hell to bell-time if he had to say that minute. He cried out, or rather, croaked out, "Marry me—marry me!—You got to marry me!"

She had married him. She had stood there a moment—or a thousand years—after he croaked his croak, as calm as though she were alone and listening for somebody to call from way down the road, or down the valley, while he heard his own heart banging, churning, and sloshing inside him like the stern wheel on the last river packet with the channel confounded and the night fog-dark as the inside of a dead bull's belly that had foundered on black silage. She stood there, in her calmness, and then laid her free hand—her left hand it would have been—on his thick head of hair, and roughed the hair just a little, like recognizing a dog or kid that's got its head against your knee, and said: "Yes, John T. Harrick. Yes, I will marry you, John T."

Even in that moment, he was aware, below the levels of other, more urgent awarenesses, of how strange it was to be called "John T." Nobody had ever called him John T. He was Jack, he was Jack Harrick. Hearing that other name, even as it answered his need and desire, he knew that something was happening to Jack Harrick. What, he didn't know. He had turned and fallen on his knees and

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cried out because for that one terrible instant he had felt that he, Jack Harrick, had been snatched up into darkness like the field mouse by the hoot owl, that caught in the vertigo of the past he didn't exist. Now as that hand, whose name he didn't know, but which was real, drew him back to reality, he wasn't Jack Harrick after all. He was John T.

That fact brought its own kind of disorientation, if a different kind. Anyway, it wasn't like being snatched off into blackness by that metaphysical hoot owl. This kind of disorientation was something that was happening quietly, inside you, even now as you were on your knees in the dark grass, shaking a little bit, like a man who had been saved from something, kissing the wrist above the hand you held so tight in both yours that there wasn't any soft, sweet-smelling female hand-hide available to kiss.

So she had married him, him, John T.—who, however, remained Jack in the salutations of Johntown and in the tales told, gradually becoming Old Jack in the tales, but remaining Jack, not John T. or Old Jack, in his own thoughts, except now and then when, as she called him John T., some vague half-humorous but discomfiting wonderment started up as to where Jack Harrick had gone, or worse, who he had been, after all.

She became Mrs. John T. Harrick, and he called her Celey. Celey, or Baby, or Honey-Baby or Doll-Baby, Doll-Baby, very privately, for her smallness, in comparison with him anyway, when he took her on his knee. In their bed-passages, however, he never, or practically never, called her anything, anything, that is, when the water got rough and the picture began to come to sharp focus. Even if things were just drifting along, especially if the light was out, he was pretty guarded about that *Celey*. No, to be more precise, as he observed to himself, with some sense of exculpation, it was not he himself, Jack Harrick, who was guarded about that *Celey*. For he loved Celey, and wasn't boasting or kidding himself when he said he damned well would run through fire for her. It wasn't himself that put the clamp on that *Celey,* it was something, but God knew what, inside himself.

And the reason, as he told himself, wasn't simply that he was afraid of making a slip and hurting her feelings. Sure, it would hurt any lady's feelings, but with Celia Hornby, with her sureness of self,

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he was sure it wouldn't be more than a flesh wound. She would know who she was, no matter what you called her. Not that a lady whose name happened to be Celia would especially relish being called Annie Laurie or Sara Lou, even by a stranger on the telephone, and certainly not in the bosom of the family, long after bull-bat time, when you had turned in early to save money on the electric bill.

But she certainly knew that Jack Harrick had voted in more than one precinct, and even if she, to his certain knowledge, was a lady who had done God's little ballot-counting, she had common sense enough to guess that a man might develop certain work habits, and enough sense of humor to realize that it took time to shake them off. Not that he wouldn't have tapped himself over the left knuckles with a ten-inch monkey wrench before he'd hurt her feelings, or that he, Jack Harrick, wouldn't have undertaken to avoid reference to Annie Laurie or Sara Lou, or such, in close discourse. It was simply that he never had to undertake to avoid them. That something inside himself did it every time, long before he ever had to.

It took him some years to guess what that something inside himself was. He guessed it some time after Celia had ceased to be Celey, or even Baby or Doll-Baby, and was only Momma, even when lights were out, or Sunday breakfast was late. By that time what he guessed didn't seem very relevant to the course of life, and he even sort of guessed that was why he managed to guess it.

What he guessed was that the something inside himself that kept such a close watch on name-calling after lights-out was not something different from himself. It was, simply, that part of himself that knew that if a wrong name got called in the dark the danger was not in the fact that Jack Harrick didn't know the name of who was there in the dark with him. The danger was in the fact that Jack Harrick might not know that Jack Harrick himself was there, might not, in fact, know who Jack Harrick was, or if Jack Harrick had ever existed. If Jack Harrick called the wrong name, that metaphysical hoot owl might swoop down again, and snatch all to blackness.

For Jack Harrick didn't say to himself any more that he wasn't ever going to die. He even mentioned that fact of his death to other people, quite casually and with a certain pride in so doing, the kind of pride, he thought in rueful midnight humor, with which, a thou-

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sand years ago, he had tossed off some information to a just-voice-changed compeer about his first piece of poontang. He took some pride in talking about his insurance. He bought a lot in the cemetery, and paid more than it was worth.

He himself wouldn't have given two whoops and a hog-holler where they dumped his two-twenty so the drainage was reasonable good, for a man didn't want to lie soggy. And the drainage was good in the old Harrick burying ground. Even if the family burying ground was gone to wrack and ruin for the most part, those old home-made stones down, and blackberry bushes and passion flower and second growth and saw briar taking the place, it would still have been good enough for him, for he wasn't any fancier than the old-timers who had beat him in the door, to bed by more than a hundred years, and tucked the covers tight.

But he had some hesitation about sticking Celia Hornby off there in the whippoorwill and possum-trot territory. She had been raised down in the valley, where the railroad ran, on the genteel side, sterling silver and Haviland china being no news to her, even if never in long supply, and she had been educated. She had been off to the Normal, and who wasn't educated if a school teacher wasn't? So he bought the lot from the *Johntown Ever-Watchful Memorial Company*. So, in an off-hand way, he would mention the lot now and then. That, too, was a little bit like mentioning his first piece, long back.

The satisfaction he got now by a casual mention of dying was not only like the satisfaction he had got feeling big about his first piece. It was also a little like the satisfaction he got when he noticed—or rather allowed himself to notice—for the first time that his wife's figure wasn't as good as it had been. Her waist was thickening and to tell the truth there was some danger, she being a short woman, might go dumpy on him, something he had never been able to abide. But when he really brought himself to look right at her, as she was leaning over to put her stockings on one morning, and admitted it, he had a sudden wave of tenderness for her. It surprised him to the very bottom. He felt warm and tender about her all day, and could not wait for night. He was as excited as a honeymooner, it seemed, and for a few days things were almost like a honeymoon.

She didn't really go dumpy on him, but she was thickened out

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some. He had to admit that, and admitting it, he would feel that something he had felt in mentioning death now or, long ago, that first piece.

But he had no intention of dying for quite a spell. There was gray in his hair as time ambled on, but you could hear that anvil ring. If you didn't hear it ringing that was because Jack Harrick was probably doing some mechanical work on a tractor or pay-loader or even a car, for a good many folks, especially farmers, not the corn-patch-and-shack hill-scratchers who wouldn't know what to do with a tractor if they had one, but the fellows who had the creek-bottoms and the white weather-boarding, asseverated with heat that Jack Harrick was a lot better mechanic than that pimply squirt down at the Chevrolet agency with a cigarette hanging out the corner of his mouth. But the anvil rang often enough to convince Johntown that Jack Harrick was in good health—and often enough to convince Jack Harrick.

The anvil rang, but less often. The gray in the hair got grayer. They put in the state highway slab through Johntown, heading over the mountains. Two new agency garages came to town, and had neon out front. Cars got longer and shinier and three-toned, and who the hell was going to drive his floating juke-box and casket of the heart's desire around to a broke-down blacksmith shop? A Greek came to town with a yellow-headed wife who looked like the kind that used to come to town with the street carnival and would merchandise it to the boys back of the tent when the show was over. People ate waffles at the Greek's restaurant.

Then the anvil didn't ring any more. The wheel chair creaked, even if the weight in it wasn't two-twenty. Celia Hornby Harrick set the glass of iced tea on the little table, and laid her cheek against the grizzled head, and he wished she was dead, dead so he could love her, and not hate her as he did when he thought of her lying alone in her bed on a June night with moon coming in the window, and staring up at the ceiling to the dark above the moon ray.

"John T.," she was saying now, and laid her cheek against his hair. "Darling John T.," she said, and he wished she were dead and six feet under so he could love her. So he could be the man in the house, even as he was dying. His hands clenched the wheel-chair as hard as he could. He knew that she could see his right hand, and that she thought it was the pain. He knew, without looking, that she

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was going to push the little pill bottle closer, and say nothing.

But he was not going to take any pill. You might as well swallow a couple of buck-shot.

"Dear John T.," she whispered, and roughed up his hair, ever so lightly, with her hand, the way you rough up a dog's head or a kid's, and went soft-footed out of the room, leaving him to take, without shame, the pill he would not take.

And he wanted her to be dead, for she had roughed up his hair that way, the way she had done in the dogwood dark, on the mountain when he had been on his knees before her, and he thought, with a burst of elation, that if then, that instant, long back on the mountain, he had turned and seized her, not falling on his knees, and ripped her, and ripped out of her what he wanted, and flung her aside on the grass and run on over the mountain, his feet scarcely touching the rocks as he ran under the dark, barely star-teased sky, then nothing would ever have happened like this. All would be different, he would not be dying in a wheel chair. He would have run on forever, over the mountain, under the dark sky.

Then the elation was gone. The tears came into his eyes, for he was ashamed of himself, and he truly loved Celia Hornby Harrick. He thought maybe he was going crazy, the way his mind ran off in all directions.

He thought of her hand roughing his hair, and croaked out, out loud, "I love you. I love you."

Then, in the cold distance, he thought how he had never really taken it away from anybody, just ripped it off 'em. He had seen it done, in the AEF, long back. Many a girl he had walked out in places so woods-dark and private and still you could have heard a goat cough two pistol shots and a spit down the mountain, and with him as strong as he had been in his days and time of strength a girl would have had about as much chance with him as a moon-bemused crawfish on a sandbar with a hungry he-coon sashaying out of the willow shade. But he never wanted any partaking that way. He had reckoned he was too proud. He never had to rip it off anybody. A little, squeally scuffle maybe, but just in friend-fun, everybody knowing how it would come out and not even a thumb-mark to show.

Then he thought he would never know how it was that way.

"Am I going crazy?" he demanded inside.

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Celia Hornby Harrick stood in the bare hall outside the door which she had just closed and wondered if he had taken the pill. She wondered how bad it would have to get before he would take a pill in front of her. Everybody had a cracking point, she reckoned. But she did not want to be around when Jack Harrick reached his cracking point. Some people knew they had a cracking point and they lived their whole lives knowing it and waiting for it; she supposed that was one way to live. But it was not Jack Harrick's way, and Jack Harrick was what she loved.

She leaned her forehead against the wall, where the wallpaper was faded and the canvas sustaining it hung loose off the wood wall to which it was tacked—the wallpaper put on for her, just after she had married Jack Harrick—and knew that his now knowing he had a cracking point was what had made her marry Jack Harrick. It had made her put her hand on his head in the dogwood dark and rough his thick hair up, like roughing up the head of a dog or kid that leans against you. If somebody does not know that he has a cracking point, and you are the person who finds out he does not know that, then you have got to be the person who is on hand to hold his hand when he finds out. Somebody has to do that. If you do not want to do certain things you should not find out certain things.

She had married him for that strength-which-is-weakness, and now, as a consequence, in that dim hall where the heat of summer had not yet begun to penetrate, she leaned her head against the wallpaper put up to make things worthy of her Haviland china and sterling silver, put up in loving tenderness by the very hands of the man who had led her down this hall to put her upon a bed and legally, respectably, and with consideration deflower her; and with her head against the wall, she now prayed. She prayed that her weakness might become enough of that weakness-which-is-strength to permit her to hold Jack Harrick's hand when the time came. She did not think she could stand to be there when Jack Harrick found Jack Harrick had a cracking point. But somebody had to be there. So she prayed: "Dear God, I can't stand it, but when the time comes I want to hold his hand."

She felt better, and lifted her head. As she moved down the hall to the kitchen, she was whispering, not as a prayer now but in some other way, the words, "I want to hold his hand." She was

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aware of a strangeness in those words said not as prayer but as if she were sleep-walking and sleep-talking, and then was aware that the strangeness was shot through with some excitement like guilt. By this time she had reached the kitchen, the old part of the house where the walls were chinked log. She stood in the middle of the floor and experienced a nameless yearning. She was sick with yearning, as she whispered again, "I want to hold his hand."

The yearning was so strong she knew it must be guilty. But why guilty?

She looked around the kitchen to find some extenuation in that scene of her common life. There was the electric stove, still good, which he had bought her when TVA came in, to replace the wood range of his mother. There were the chinked logs which she hadn't let him cover. There was the big old stone fireplace, with the cooking crane and pot, which she had made him knock the boards off, saying to him, "No—no, John T.—whatever made you want to cover that beautiful old fireplace? Why it's just like a magazine, John T.!" And he had grumbled in man-heartiness, out of some duty to something, then grinned, and pinched her bottom, and knocked the boards off. And later he had bought an old-timey bear-grease lamp somewhere, and cleaned it and stuck it in the stone chimney for her, to make it more like a magazine, he said, if you had to look like a durn-fool magazine. She had kissed him for thanks, and he had chased her three times around the kitchen table, like when they were first married, but she was nimble and got away. She had always been nimble-footed. And two-twenty is wide on the turns.

She looked now at that grease lamp stuck in the stone, and it was suddenly as though somebody had hit her back of the knees with the heavy end, and narrow edge, of a pick-handle. They just gave down, with no warning. But she managed to get hold of a chair back, and sit down before the tears came. "It's just because I want to hold your hand, John T," she was murmuring.

By this time, however, with the sight of the grease lamp and the rectifying sweetness of tears, she had lost track of why she had wanted to hold Jack Harrick's hand in the first place. She was simply engulfed in the mysteriousness of the moment.

It was just that he was going to die. He had lived toward fifty years before she had ever laid eyes on him—on a bright winter afternoon, snow on the street, the Ford pick-up slithering in the snow

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despite chain, a tall man standing in the back of the truck, riding the sway like a sailor on a tossing deck, hatless, wearing a red-plaid mackinaw and cow-hide boots, waving a rifle easy as a bookkeeper waves a lead pencil, yelling like a kid to some crony, yelling, "Yeah, got two!" then tossing the rifle down, on a tarpaulin-covered heap in the trunk, and leaning over to come up with a fresh bear skin, holding the big head high above his own head, the bear-jaw open in a last white-tusk-studded rage, the eyes staring, fixed and unrelenting under the blood-streaked spot where the 30.30 had gone in, the big hide, black fur side and bloody side, trailing down half over the red mackinaw, and the bare-headed man's face, with a blood-streak now on it from the hide, poked around it, grinning with teeth as white as the bear's.

She was twenty-one then, just that fall come up from the valley, leaving her mother with the genteel chafing-dish and Haviland china and the father with his wax-colored hands and consumptive cough and county-seat law practice, and tidy bank account, leaving Normal and, she suddenly knew, the silly girls with their silly engagements and the pimply boys, to any number of whom she could have been engaged to, if she hadn't been honest enough with herself to know that if their hands ever got into her dress she would just be stiff as a board. But she hadn't been willing to fake things up, and now it was three-thirty on a winter afternoon, as she stood beside one of the other teachers in whose house she had a room and kitchenette, an older woman, a native of Johntown, daughter of a physician now deceased, named Abernathy, and heard the woman sniff.

"Who's that?" she asked the woman.

"Just another hillbilly that thinks he is Daniel Boone," the woman said, and curled her lip in the expression which was the terror of the Sixth Grade.

"He killed the bear," Celia Hornby said, uttering the superfluous words half as though talking to herself. She had never seen a bear, except in a zoo, at the Glendale Park in Nashville, long back.

"He'll probably claim he choked it to death," the woman said. "Without gloves on."

"Did he?" the girl asked. "Did he choke one—not this one—but did he ever choke one to death?"

"No," the woman said, with bitterness, staring unforgivingly at

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the unforgiving bear jaws and the blood-streaked face of the man peeking from around the hide, "he stood a long distance away, a perfectly safe distance, mind you, and murdered the defenseless animal with a rifle. But now that hillbilly stands up there yelling like an idiot, and thinks he's a hero, and by tomorrow night some other fool hillbilly will be telling how Jack Harrick strangled the creature with his hands. Oh, yes," she said, with a last climactic flourish of the bitterness, "That is Jack Harrick, the hero of all the hillbillies! The tales they tell about him—just so they can feel big."

The girl found herself looking at the woman now, at the bitter face now drawn mercilessly, and unconsciously, after the swaying idiot on the retreating pick-up, and found herself desperately saying inside herself, as she stared at the woman's face, *I don't want to be like that, like Miss Abernathy, oh God, don't let me be like that!*

She wasn't prepared to say exactly what "that" was that she did not, suddenly, want to be like, but no prayer she had ever uttered—and she was a sincerely religious girl—had been so urgent. Then, she turned her eyes after the truck, which was just then slithering around a corner, and in that last glimpse it seemed almost as though her prayer had been answered. She felt warm and soft inside. She felt calmly happy, and the sun fell bright over everything, even the churned-up, mud-streaked snow of the street of Johntown.

With a start, she heard the woman saying, not in bitterness now, in some sad, fatalistic explanation as it were: "He's a blacksmith."

For a moment Celia Hornby didn't quite connect the remark with the man on the pick-up truck. It didn't seem, somehow, that that man had ever had to earn any living, in any way, just living, flashing through the world, holding up a bloody bear-skin, and yelling in good humor and joy.

"Blacksmith?" she echoed, pulling herself back to things like earning livings, and how you did it.

"Yes," the woman said, "a blacksmith!" Then, as though apologizing for some edge that had been now added to the word, she said: "Oh, I don't mean it's not a decent, honorable livelihood. If it's all you can do. It's just—"

She stopped herself, like a person who stops on the brink.

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Celia Hornby looked at her: "The tales, you said. You said they tell tales about him."

The woman leaped at the idea. "Yes," she exclaimed, "Yes—— that's it. It's not just being a blacksmith. It's the things he does—— the tales."

"You said he never really strangled a bear," the girl said, honestly puzzled.

"Oh, don't be a ninny!" the woman said in ferocious contempt, hidden anger flashing between the words, like the hot molten inwardness showing when the crust cracks on the slow-moving lava-field. Then seeing the girl's shocked, hurt face, she controlled herself, tried to patch things up. "You are so young," she said, "but you know. It's the things he does."

"I suppose he drinks," musingly said Celia Hornby, in whose father's house that word had seemed the synonym for all unnameable depravities.

"Drinks!" Miss Abernathy snorted, the ferocity and contempt glinting out anew. "You could float Old Ironsides in the amount of illegal and poisonous moonshine whisky that man has drunk. Drink! —drinking and brawling. But—" She stopped, and scanned the girl's face, till the face flushed with the guilt of unacknowledged speculations stirring deep down. Then, as though satisfied with what she saw on the face, she leaned closer, almost whispering, darkening the bright winter sunshine of the street to a sudden preternatural twilight full of a close, musky odor, and said: "You know what! He is shameless. It is the shameless—it is the shameless things he does to—to women."

Well, he was never to do anything to Celia Hornby that she thought was shameful. Except, of course, the first thing.

It was that time in the post office, the first time he had ever spoken to her. She supposed it wasn't more his fault than hers, if it was anybody's and not just a plain accident. She had been in a hurry to get her mail one morning, one Sunday morning, out of her post office box. With her key in her hand, she had made a little dive toward the lock, just as a man, stooping with back toward her to open a box next to hers moved a little bit as the box came open. She bumped him. He swung around, straightening up, swinging away on the ball of his right foot, with a lightness that, even then in

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her confusion, she was aware of as incongruous to his size. "Oh," she cried out, "oh, I'm so sorry!"

Then she saw that, despite blue serge and white shirt, and no bear-skin, the man was the man of the pick-up truck, and he was looking right at her.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she repeated, more flustered.

"Well, lady," he said, and his bright blue glance was flickering on her, "you just be sorry to your little heart's content. But—" and the bright glance was flickering all over her, plucking, "—I'm not. And don't aim to be."

She wasn't wearing any low-neck dress, even if spring had just begun to come on, but his eyes, she knew, were looking right there just as though she did have on one. And then, as she recognized that fact, it was as shameful as though right there in broad daylight he had snapped off a button and run his hand in. He was grinning at her, just like he had, and didn't intend to take it out quick. But that wasn't the shameful thing. The shameful thing was that, even that second in the midst of being ashamed, she was happy there was something there worth his trouble to be putting his hand on. She felt full—and in a funny way, almost sleepy.

It was that feeling that made her have to say "What—I beg your pardon?" when he said something she hadn't heard a word of.

"I said," he said, "you look like you're going to church. All dressed up."

She nodded.

"Well," he said, "would it discombobulate or embarrass you if I walked you as far as the door?"

If he had been a young man, near her own age, looking down at her like that, where he had looked, and then asking her to walk to church, she might very well have refused him curtly, as fresh. But this man was, she knew, as old as her father, and she was saying that deep down in herself, *why, he's old as my father,* and mixed with that, too, was a sudden, quickly blacked-out vision of her father's waxy hand reaching for the bottle of cough medicine, or some other God-damned thing.

Some other God-damned thing—yes, those words had actually been in her, as part of the vision, and it was the awareness of their

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sinful blasphemy, words she had never in her life uttered, that made her black it out.

But no, maybe it was something else, for she had, in the same flash, done something worse, not only taking the name of the Lord God in vain, but knocking twin dents in the Decalogue at the same time. For in that instant, she had been far from honoring her father. She had hated him, as cleanly as a sizzling, ammoniac flash of lightning in the dark. She hated him, simply, because he was the way he, so awfully and without being able to help himself, was. He had never ridden on a slithering truck, yelling like an idiot as he held up a bloody bear head.

The vision was over in a flash, like the lightning flash leaving only the tingling ammoniac smell as the dark closed again in her inner night. But it had unsettled her so that she wasn't able to answer until he spoke again: "Little lady, how about it. I'll just walk you to the door." Then he laughed: "You know, they mightn't let me in the door. Even if Ole Mac—he's the preacher—used to be a side-kick of mine. Before he took scairt of weather-signs and ran for cover. Come on—let me walk you to the door."

"Yes," she said.

His being an older man, even if he didn't exactly look it, that made it all right. Or made it so much worse, it was hopeless anyway, or something.

The next time or two they met on the street, he spoke politely and passed on. Certainly that was all she herself intended to do, but when it was what he did, she was a little nettled, then ashamed of herself. Then she realized that both those times he had been wearing his work clothes; and she explained to herself that he had had the delicacy not to embarrass a lady by stopping to speak with her under those circumstances.

The next time she met him, he was in shirt sleeves—the spring had begun to show real signs—but he had on dark trousers with a crease, and the shirt was white. It was after supper, with a little light in the sky still toward seven, and she had walked downtown to the post office, to mail a letter, this time to one of those silly engaged girls from Normal. He was lounging down the street in his clean shirt sleeves—what he put on, she reckoned—after work. That thought was prim, decent, and comforting.

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He stopped, and bowed. He didn't have any hat on to take off, but she saw that his thick, somewhat unruly black hair had been thoroughly wetted and brushed ferociously into submission. "Good evening," he said, and added in a sly way, as though it were some joke he had on her "—Miss Hornby." No names had passed between them on the previous encounters, not even on the walk to the door of the Baptist Church.

"Good evening," she now said, and lifting her head with a little air of defiance—defiance of what, she didn't quite know—added: "Mr. Harrick."

She was wearing a low-necked dress, her first of the season, in honor of the mild evening, with a blue cashmere cardigan around her shoulders, blue in honor of her eyes. He looked into her eyes, but only for a second, and not at all down at the low neck of the dress, at the place where he had made her feel shameful, and shamefully happy, in the post office. Now, in fact, he looked off down the street, as he began to speak. "If you've got a minute, Miss Hornby," he began.

She said she did, but looked, not too secretly, at her watch.

"That moving picture, *The Big Parade,*" he said, "the one everybody is so het up about. It is coming to Knoxville again." He stopped, then, with a tone of apology proceeded. "It's not I'm one for moving pictures," he said, "and I missed it then, four years ago when it came. But I had the notion—" And he stopped again, then picked up: "But it's about the war. About the AEF, and over there in France. Well—well, I was sort of—over there, and—"

Yes, she knew he had been there, though she didn't say so, letting him suffer it out. She knew he had been there and had the Congressional Medal to prove it. She knew the Governor of the State had met him at the train when he got to Nashville on the way home.

"You know, a fellow likes to see some place he's been, and how it was. I thought I'd go, and—" He hesitated, then plunged on. "Mr. and Mrs. Blunden, and Mrs. Blunden's mother, she's an old lady," —emphasizing the word *old*—"and it's in their car,"—emphasizing the word *their*—"and I sort of had the notion, it being a fine picture and sort of educational, they say—"

He stopped dead. He brought his eyes back to her, and looked at her face, with a saddening lack of expectation.

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Oh, the big fake! she was thinking, with all his fake hemming and hawing and stammering. Did he think she didn't see through him? Did he take her for a fool? What kind of fool girls were deceived by him and led off into the dark where he seized them and practiced some shameful thing on them that made them cry out? Well, she'd show him!

But she heard herself saying, as calm as the evening sky: "Why, Mr. Harrick, I'd love to see it."

He was hanging on to that sad unexpectant expression on his face as long as possible, she was sure of that, just to let her see the innocent joy slowly dawn there. "Would you, really?" he was saying. "Would you, Miss Hornby?"

"Of course, I would," she said briskly, eyeing him as though he were in the Third Grade. "For I didn't see it either, when it first came out, you see, my mother thought I was too young." Then she added, with even more cheerful malice: "I'd love to go if old Mrs. Blunden's old, old mother is really going. And if asking me is what you had in mind with all that hemming and hawing."

"Lady," he said, grinning, "that was what had crossed my mind."

"Don't think I don't see through you," she said, in her newly-acquired school-room air of having caught out the culprit who threw the spit-ball.

"Lady," he said, soberly, "I promise you one thing. I promise you I don't see through you."

She was so startled, she couldn't reply.

"Lady," he said, and as he stared down into her face she saw his head outlined against the pink-paling sky of evening, "I bet if I threw a rock down your well, I'd be listening down in the dark a long time before it hit water."

* * *

The Sixth Grade teacher, Miss Abernathy, was waiting up for her when she got in from Knoxville, well after midnight. She had not told Miss Abernathy where, or with whom, she was going, but Miss Abernathy, she was sure, had her own sources of information and had been on the wire before the sound of the strange car had died away from her front gate. "You've been to Knoxville," Miss Abernathy announced.

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"Yes," the girl said, and peeled off her black gloves.

"You have been to that moving picture that glorifies lust and violence."

"They were in love," the girl said. "That was all. And I don't guess there was any more fighting and all than in the *Birth of a Nation,* and you said you liked that."

"That was different," Miss Abernathy said.

"This is supposed to be educational," the girl said. "It is historical, in its way. I found it educational."

"Presumably," Miss Abernathy said, and curled her lip.

"I went to the movie with Mr. Harrick," the girl announced sweetly, stealing what she knew was the thunder Miss Abernathy held in reserve, and before Miss Abernathy could reply, added, "and with Mr. and Mrs. Blunden, who are quite respectable, and with Mrs. Blunden's old, old mother."

She was proud of that last touch. She didn't know what had got into her, but she felt like riding it out.

Miss Abernathy got up to her scantling-thin height. "You know my views," she said. "You have rented a room in my house, and as long as you remain under this roof I expect conduct that will not reflect discredit on this house or the name of my father who built it."

"Miss Abernathy," the girl said, "I know that your father was a very respectable physician."

"He was indeed," Miss Abernathy said.

"Well, mine is a very able lawyer, and has won cases in front of the Supreme Court of this state. He knows all about the laws of libel, and if anything should be insinuated about his daughter which would not stand up in court, he would make it cost very, very dear."

"Well, you'd never get another job teaching," Miss Abernathy said, leaning viperously. "Not at Johntown, or anywhere else!"

"But you see," Celia Hornby said, gay and surprised at what she was going to say, "I'm not going to teach any more. I'm going to get married!"

"To—to that—"

"Yes, of course," she said. "To that blacksmith! Only he hasn't proposed. He doesn't even know it yet, but he will."

"Ah," Miss Abernathy breathed, eyes glittering, "so you're—"

The girl shook her head, laughing. She had never had so much

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fun even if she didn't know where it might end, like a roller-coaster going too fast. "No," she said, and had to stop for the giggles, "it's not that. You know, from what I hear, that might not be the best way with Mr. Harrick. Besides, I really am a virgin. I haven't been loved up much even, not even after dances in the back of a car. I never even let a hand get between my legs, the way some nice girls do—yes, they do, they've told me—"

"Hush, hush!" Miss Abernathy cried out. "I won't hear this in this house!"

But she did, for Celia Hornby was whirling right on, spinning like stars, in the run-away roller-coaster, saying: "I really am a virgin—just like you are—or aren't you, Miss Abernathy?—"

"Hush, hush!" Miss Abernathy implored, but it was no use, for Celia Hornby hadn't really hesitated for an answer to her question, whirling on: "And when Mr. Harrick does to me whatever he does to stop me from being a virgin, I want—"

"Shameful—oh, it will be shameful!" Miss Abernathy cried out, wringing her hands, or seeming about to. "You're only a young girl, and you don't know Jack Harrick—what he will do—how shameful!"

"Yes, shameful, just like what your father did to your mother was shameful," the girl rebutted, thoroughly delighted with that flourish.

"But, oh,—it wasn't like that!" Miss Abernathy cried, in her last despair, "not like Jack Harrick! Oh, you are vile!"

"Well, whatever he does," Celia Hornby said, "to make me stop being a virgin, I want to be perfectly comfortable. I don't want to be in the back seat of any old car. I want to be in a big comfortable bed, as big as the state of Kansas and dark as pitch, so I could just sink back forever and be comfortable and get the most out of whatever he is going to do. Wouldn't you want it that way, Miss Abernathy? Wouldn't you? And that's why I'm going to wait till Mr. Harrick takes me to a bed as big as the state of Kansas and dark as pitch, and—"

Her words trailed off. There really wasn't any use talking any more, for Miss Abernathy wasn't there. She had managed to go out, to totter out, propping herself from one chair to the table, from the table to another chair, from that chair to the door jamb, thence

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into the dark hall. "Remember about libel suits!" Celia Hornby called gaily after her.

Celia Hornby went upstairs to her room. She was terribly excited with herself, for being the way she was, the new way she had never expected. It was like getting a present. She looked in the mirror at her still flushed cheeks and brightened eyes, and said, "Gosh," in a kind of awe, "Gosh, Celia Hornby," she repeated, peering more closely at the face in the mirror, and she was a little appalled, and afraid, too. And she was sorry, a little, about Miss Abernathy. In a kind of muted way, carefully getting out of range of the mirror, she got undressed, and into her nightgown. She didn't want to brush her teeth, or comb her hair. She liked the faint sense of escape, rebellion, untidiness, frowsiness. But she came back to the mirror and looked at herself standing there in her nightgown. She wanted to lift up her nightgown and see her whole self, as she might be seen. But that didn't seem decent. She thought that might, somehow, be really shameful.

So she got into bed, still in that strange muted way, which was really, she knew, just another kind of excitement. She lay in the dark and thought that she didn't care what Mr. Harrick might do to her. She didn't care if he bit her till she bled. She wondered if he might bite her.

She was just about to drift off to sleep, wondering, when she remembered that she had not said her prayers. She got up, and knelt by the bed and said them, as she had always done, and was surprised, after she got back into bed, how her prayers and her still wondering about Mr. Harrick was all part of the same nice warmness of things.

She thought of Mr. Harrick, fully dressed somehow, kneeling beside the bed with her. She would teach him to pray, to get on his knees and pray with her to God, and then she would lie in his arms all night. No, she revised that, he would be asleep and she would watch over him. Like praying for him.

* * *

Now standing in the kitchen, which he had fixed up for her just like a magazine, quaint and old-timey, she wondered if she could take him some more iced tea. She wondered if there was anything, anything in the world, she could do for him.

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Irving Howe

MASS SOCIETY AND POST-MODERN FICTION*

Raskolnikov is lying on his bed: feverish, hungry, despondent. The servant Nastasya has told him that the landlady plans to have him evicted. He has received a letter from his mother in which she writes that for the sake of money his sister Dounia is to marry an elderly man she does not love. And he has already visited the old pawnbroker and measured the possibility of murdering her.

There seems no way out, no way but the liquidation of the miserly hunchback whose disappearance from the earth would cause no one any grief. Tempted by the notion that the strong, simply because they are strong, may impose their will upon the weak, Raskolnikov lies there, staring moodily at the ceiling. It must be done: so he tells himself and so he resolves.

Suddenly—but here I diverge a little from the text—the doorbell rings. A letter. Raskolnikov tears it open:

Dear Sir,

It is my pleasure to inform you, on behalf of the Guggenheim Foundation, that you have been awarded a fellowship for the study of color imagery in Pushkin's poetry and its relation to the myths of the ancient Muscovites. If you will be kind enough to visit our offices, at Nevsky Prospect and Q Street, arrangements can be made for commencing your stipend immediately.

(signed) Moevsky

Trembling with joy, Raskolnikov sinks to his knees and bows his head in gratitude. The terrible deed he had contemplated can

* In an earlier form, this essay was first read as a lecture at several mid-Western universities. A few sentences are taken from a review of current fiction which I have written for the *New Republic*.

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now be forgotten; he need no longer put his theories to the test; the way ahead, he tells himself, is clear.

But Dostoevsky: is the way now clear for him? May not Raskolnikov's salvation prove to be Dostoevsky's undoing? For Dostoevsky must now ask himself: how, if the old pawnbroker need no longer be destroyed, can Raskolnikov's pride be brought to a visible dramatic climax? The theme remains, for we may imagine that Raskolnikov will still be drawn to notions about the rights of superior individuals; but a new way of realizing this theme will now have to be found.

It is a common assumption of modern criticism that Dostoevsky's ultimate concern was not with presenting a picture of society, nor merely with showing us the difficulties faced by an impoverished young intellectual in Czarist Russia. He was concerned with the question of what a human being, acting in the name of his freedom or disenchantment, may take upon himself. Yet we cannot help noticing that the social setting of his novel "happens" to fit quite exactly the requirements of his theme: it is the situation in which Raskolnikov finds himself that embodies the moral and metaphysical problems which, as we like to say, form Dostoevsky's deepest interest.

The sudden removal of Raskolnikov's poverty, as I have imagined it a moment ago, does not necessarily dissolve the temptation to test his will through killing another human being; but it does eliminate the immediate cause for committing the murder. Gliding from fellowship to fellowship, Raskolnikov may now end his life as a sober Professor of Literature. Like the rest of us, he will occasionally notice in himself those dim urges and quavers that speak for hidden powers beyond the assuagement of reason. He may remember that once, unlikely as it has now come to seem, he was even tempted to murder an old woman. But again like the rest of us, he will dismiss these feelings as unworthy of a civilized man.

The case is not hopeless for Dostoevsky: it never is for a writer of his stature. He can now invent other ways of dramatizing the problem that had concerned him in the novel as it was to be, the novel before Moevsky's letter arrived; but it is questionable whether even he could imagine circumstances—imagine circumstances, as distinct from expressing sentiments—which would lead so persuasively, so inexorably to a revelation of Raskolnikov's moral heresy as do those

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in what I am tempted to call the unimproved version of *Crime and Punishment.*

From which it will not be concluded, I hope, that a drop in our standard of living is needed in order to provide novelists with extreme or vivid situations. I am merely trying to suggest that in reading contemporary fiction one sometimes feels that the writers find themselves in situations like the one I have here fancied for Dostoevsky.

II

Let us assume for a moment that we have reached the end of one of those recurrent periods of cultural unrest, innovation and excitement that we call "modern." Whether we really have no one can say with assurance, and there are strong arguments to be marshalled against such a claim. But if one wishes to reflect upon some—the interesting minority—of the novels written in America during the past 15 years, there is a decided advantage in regarding them as "post-modern," significantly different from the kind of writing we usually call modern. Doing this helps one to notice the distinctive qualities of recent novels: what makes them new. It tunes the ear to their distinctive failures. And it lures one into patience and charity.

That modern novelists—those, say, who began writing after the early work of Henry James—have been committed to a peculiarly anxious and persistent search for values, everyone knows. By now this search for values has become not only a familiar but an expected element in modern fiction; that is, a tradition has been established in which it conspicuously figures, and readers have come, somewhat unhistorically, to regard it as a necessary component of the novel. It has been a major cause for that reaching, sometimes a straining toward moral surprise, for that inclination to transform the art of narrative into an act of cognitive discovery, which sets modern fiction apart from a large number of 18th and even 19th century novels.

Not so frequently noticed, however, is the fact that long after the modern novelist had come to suspect and even assault traditional values there was still available to him—I would say, until about the Second World War—a cluster of stable assumptions as to the nature of our society. If the question, "How shall we live?" agitated the novelists without rest, there was a remarkable consensus in their an-

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swers to the question, "How do we live?"—a consensus not so much in explicit opinion as in a widely shared feeling about Western society.

Indeed, the turn from the realistic social novel among many of the modern writers would have been most unlikely had there not been available such a similarity of response to the familiar social world. At least some of the novelists who abandoned realism seem to have felt that modern society had been exhaustively, perhaps even excessively portrayed (so D.H. Lawrence suggests in one of his letters) and that the task of the novelist was now to explore a chaotic multiplicity of meanings rather than to continue representing the surfaces of common experience.

No matter what their social bias, and regardless of whether they were aware of having any, the modern novelists tended to assume that the social relations of men in the world of capitalism were established, familiar, knowable. If Joyce could write of Stephen Dedalus that "his destiny was to be elusive of social or religious orders," that was partly because he knew and supposed his readers to know what these orders were. If Lawrence in his later works could write a new kind of novel that paid as little attention to the external phenomena of the social world as to the fixed conventions of novelistic "character," that was partly because he had already registered both of these—the social world and the recognizable solid characters—in *Sons and Lovers*. The observations of class relationships in the earlier novels are not discarded by Lawrence in the later ones; they are tacitly absorbed to become a basis for a new mode of vision.

Values, as everyone now laments, were in flux; but society, it might be remembered, was still there: hard, tangible, ruled by a calculus of gain. One might not know what to make of this world, but at least one knew what was happening in it. Every criticism that novelists might direct against society had behind it enormous pressures of evidence, enormous accumulations of sentiment; and this, one might remark to those literary people who bemoan the absence of "tradition," this is the tradition that has been available to and has so enriched modern fiction. A novelist like F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose gifts for conceptual thought were rather meager, could draw to great advantage upon the social criticism that for over a century had preceded him, the whole lengthy and bitter assault upon bourgeois norms that had been launched by the spokesmen for culture.

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That Fitzgerald may have known little more than the names of these spokesmen, that he drew upon their work with only a minimum of intellectual awareness, serves merely to confirm my point. The rapidity with which such criticism was accumulated during the nineteenth century, whether by Marx or Carlyle, Nietzsche or Mill, enabled the modern novelists to feel they did not need to repeat the work of Flaubert and Dickens, Balzac and Zola: they could go beyond them.

Between radical and conservative writers, as between both of these and the bulk of non-political ones, there were many bonds of shared feeling—a kinship they themselves were often unable to notice but which hindsight permits us to see. The sense of the banality of middle class existence, of its sensuous and spiritual meanness, is quite the same among the conservative as the radical writers, and their ideas about the costs and possibilities of rising in the bourgeois world are not so very different either.

If one compares two American novelists so different in formal opinion, social background and literary method as Theodore Dreiser and Edith Wharton, it becomes clear that in such works as *Sister Carrie* and *The House of Mirth* both are relying upon the same crucial assumption: that values, whether traditional or modernist, desirable or false, can be tested in a novel by dramatizing the relationships between mobile characters and fixed social groups. Neither writer felt any need to question, neither would so much as think to question, the presence or impact of these social groups as they formed part of the examined structure of class society. In both novels "the heart of fools is in the house of mirth," the heartbreak house of the modern city; and as Carrie Meeber and Lily Bart make their way up and down the social hierarchy, their stories take on enormous weights of implication because we are ready to assume *some* relationship—surely not the one officially proclaimed by society, nor a mere inversion of it, but still some complex and significant relationship—between the observed scale of social place and the evolving measure of moral value. It is this assumption that has been a major resource of modern novelists; for without some such assumption there could not occur the symbolic compression of incident, the readiness to assume that X stands for Y, which is a prerequisite for the very existence of the novel.

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Beset though they might be by moral uncertainties, the modern novelists could yet work through to a relative assurance in their treatment of the social world; and one reason for this assurance was that by the early years of our century the effort to grasp this world conceptually was very far advanced. The novelists may not have been aware of the various theories concerning capitalism, the city and modern industrial society; it does not matter. These ideas had so thoroughly penetrated the consciousness of thinking men, and even the folklore of the masses, that the novelists could count on them without necessarily being able to specify or elaborate them. In general, when critics "find" ideas in novels, they are transposing to a state of abstraction those assumptions which had become so familiar to novelists that they were able to seize them as sentiments.

Part of what I have been saying runs counter to the influential view that writers of prose fiction in America have written romances and not novels because, in words of Lionel Trilling that echo a more famous complaint of Henry James, there has been in this country "no sufficiency of means for the display of a variety of manners, no opportunity for the novelist to do his job of searching out reality, not enough complication of appearance to make the job interesting." I am not sure that this was ever true of American fiction—the encounter between Ishmael and Queequeg tells us as much about manners (American manners), and through manners about the moral condition of humanity, as we are likely to find in a novel by Jane Austen or Balzac. But even if it is granted that the absence of clear-cut distinctions of class made it impossible in the nineteenth century to write novels about American society and encouraged, instead, a species of philosophical romance, this surely ceased to be true by about 1880. Since then, at least, there has been "enough complication of appearance to make the job interesting."

Nor am I saying—what seems to me much more dubious—that the presumed absence in recent years of a fixed, stratified society or of what one critic, with enviable naiveté, calls "an agreed picture of the universe" makes it impossible to study closely our social life, or to develop (outside of the South) human personalities rooted in a sense of tradition, or to write good novels dealing with social manners and relationships. That all of these things can be done we know, simply because they have been done. I wish merely to suggest that

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certain assumptions concerning modern society, which have long provided novelists with symbolic economies and dramatic conveniences, are no longer quite so available as they were a few decades ago. To say this is not to assert that we no longer have recognizable social classes in the United States, or that distinctions in manners have ceased to be significant. It is to suggest that the modern theories about society—theories which for novelists have usually been present as tacit assumptions—have partly broken down; and that this presents a great many new difficulties for the younger writers. New difficulties, which is also to say: new possibilities.

III

In the last two decades there has occurred a series of changes in American life, the extent, durability and significance of which no one has yet measured. No one can. We speak of the growth of a "mass society," a term I shall try to define in a moment; but at best this is merely a useful hypothesis, not an accredited description. It is a notion that lacks common consent, for it does not yet merit common consent. Still, one can say with some assurance that the more sensitive among the younger writers, those who feel that at whatever peril to their work and careers they must grapple with something new in contemporary experience, even if, like everyone else, they find it extremely hard to say what that "newness" consists of—such writers recognize that the once familiar social categories and place-marks have now become as uncertain and elusive as the moral imperatives of the nineteenth century seemed to novelists of fifty years ago. And the something new which they notice or stumble against is, I would suggest, the mass society.

By the mass society we mean a relatively comfortable, half welfare and half garrison society in which the population grows passive, indifferent and atomized; in which traditional loyalties, ties and associations become lax or dissolve entirely; in which coherent publics based on definite interests and opinions gradually fall apart; and in which man becomes a consumer, himself mass-produced like the products, diversions and values that he absorbs.

No social scientist has yet come up with a theory of mass society that is entirely satisfying; no novelist has quite captured its still amorphous symptoms—a peculiar blend of frenzy and sluggishness,

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amiability and meanness. I would venture the guess that a novelist unaware of the changes in our experience to which the theory of mass society points, is a novelist unable to deal successfully with recent American life; while one who focussed only upon those changes would be unable to give his work an adequate sense of historical depth.

This bare description of the mass society can be extended by noting a few traits or symptoms:

1) Social classes continue to exist, and the society cannot be understood without reference to them; yet the visible tokens of class are less obvious than in earlier decades and the correlations between class status and personal condition, assumed both by the older sociologists and the older novelists, become elusive and problematic—which is not, however, to say that such correlations no longer exist.
2) Traditional centers of authority, like the family, tend to lose some of their binding-power upon human beings; vast numbers of people now float through life with a burden of freedom they can neither sustain nor legitimately abandon to social or religious groups.
3) Traditional ceremonies that have previously marked moments of crisis and transition in human life, thereby helping men to accept such moments, are now either neglected or debased into mere occasions for public display.
4) Passivity becomes a widespread social attitude: the feeling that life is a drift over which one has little control and that even when men do have shared autonomous opinions they cannot act them out in common.
5) As perhaps never before, opinion is manufactured systematically and "scientifically."
6) Opinion tends to flow unilaterally, from the top down, in measured quantities: it becomes a market commodity.
7) Disagreement, controversy, polemic are felt to be in bad taste; issues are "ironed out" or "smoothed away"; reflection upon the nature of society is replaced by observation of its mechanics.
8) The era of "causes," good or bad, comes to an end; strong beliefs seem anachronistic; and as a result, agnostics have even been known to feel a certain nostalgia for the rigors of belief.
9) Direct and first-hand experience seems to evade human beings, though the quantity of busy-ness keeps increasing and the number of events multiplies with bewildering speed.

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10) The pressure of material need visibly decreases, yet there follows neither a sense of social release nor a feeling of personal joy; instead, people become increasingly aware of their social dependence and powerlessness.

Now this is a social cartoon and not a description of American society; but it is a cartoon that isolates an aspect of our experience with a suggestiveness that no other mode of analysis is likely to match. Nor does it matter that no actual society may ever reach the extreme condition of a "pure" mass society; the value of the theory lies in bringing to our attention a major historical drift.

If there is any truth at all in these speculations, they should help illuminate the problems faced by the novelists whose work began to appear shortly after the Second World War. They had to confront not merely the chronic confusion of values which has gripped our civilization for decades. In a sense they were quite prepared for that—the whole of modern literature taught them to expect little else. But they had also to face a problem which, in actually composing a novel, must have been still more troublesome: our society no longer lent itself to assured definition, one could no longer assume as quickly as in the recent past that a spiritual or moral difficulty could find a precise embodiment in a social conflict. Raskolnikov, fellowship in hand, might still be troubled by the metaphysical question of what a human being can allow himself; but Raskolnikov as a graduate student with an anxious young wife and a two-year-old baby—what was the novelist to make of him? Something fresh and valuable, no doubt; but only if he were aware that this new Raskolnikov had to be seen in ways significantly different from those of the traditional modern novelists.

How to give shape to a world increasingly shapeless and an experience increasingly fluid; how to reclaim the central assumption of the novel that telling relationships can be discovered between a style of social behavior and a code of moral judgment, or if that proves impossible, to find ways of imaginatively projecting the code in its own right—these were the difficulties that faced the young novelists. It was as if the guidelines of both our social thought and literary conventions were being erased. Or as a young German writer has recently remarked:

There's no longer a society to write about. In former years you knew

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where you stood: the peasants read the Bible; the maniacs read *Mein Kampf*. Now people no longer have any opinions; they have refrigerators. Instead of illusions we have television, instead of tradition, the Volkswagon. The only way to catch the spirit of the times is to write a handbook on home appliances.

Taken literally, this is close to absurd; taken as half-comic hyperbole, it reaches a genuine problem.

The problem, in part, is the relationship between the writer and his materials. Some years ago Van Wyck Brooks had spoken of the conflict between the life of the spirit and the life of commerce, and had called upon American writers to make their choice. Most of them did. Almost every important writer in twentieth century America, whether or not he read Brooks, implicitly accepted his statement as the truth and chose, with whatever lapses or qualifications, to speak for the life of the Spirit.

But was the conflict between spirit and commerce, between culture and society still so acute during the postwar years? Was not a continued belief in this conflict a stale and profitless hangover from the ideologies of the Thirties? Might there not be ground for feeling, among the visible signs of our careless postwar prosperity, that a new and more moderate vision of society should inform the work of our novelists? It hardly matters which answers individual writers gave to these questions; the mere fact that they were now being seriously raised had a profound impact upon their work.

Those few who favored a bluntly "positive" approach to American society found it hard to embody their sentiments in vibrant—or even credible—fictional situations. The values of accommodation were there for the asking, but they seemed, perversely, to resist creative use. For almost two decades now there has been an outpouring of "affirmative" novels about American businessmen—Executive Suites in various shades; but I do not know of a single serious critic who finds these books anything but dull and mediocre. At least in our time, the novel seems to lend itself irrevocably to the spirit of criticism; as Camus has remarked, it "is born simultaneously with the spirit of rebellion and expresses, on the esthetic plane, the same ambition."

But what has been so remarkable and disconcerting is that those writers who wished to preserve the spirit of rebellion also found it extremely hard to realize their sentiments in novels dealing with

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contemporary life. Most of them were unable, or perhaps too shrewd, to deal with the postwar experience directly; they preferred tangents of suggestion to frontal representation; they could express their passionate, though often amorphous, criticism of American life not through realistic portraiture but through fable, picaresque, prophecy and nostalgia.

Morally the young novelists were often more secure than their predecessors. Few of them were as susceptible to money and glitter as Fitzgerald; few had Hemingway's weakness for bravado and swagger; few succumbed to hallucinatory rhetoric in the manner of Faulkner. Yet, as novelists, they were less happily "placed" than the writers who began to publish in the Twenties and early Thirties. They lacked the pressure of inevitable subjects as these take shape in situations and locales. They lacked equivalents of Fitzgerald's absorption with social distinctions, Hemingway's identification with expatriates, Faulkner's mourning over the old South. Sentiments they had in abundance and often fine ones; but to twist a remark of Gertrude Stein's, literature is not made of sentiments.

Literature is not made of sentiments; yet a good portion of what is most fresh in recent American fiction derives from sentiments. Better than any other group of literate Americans, our novelists resisted the mood of facile self-congratulation which came upon us during the postwar years. To be novelists at all, they had to look upon our life without ideological delusions; and they saw—*often better than they could say*—the hovering sickness of soul, the despairing contentment, the prosperous malaise. They were not, be it said to their credit, taken in. Yet the problem remained: how can one represent malaise, which by its nature is vague and without shape? It can be done, we know. But to do it one needs to be Chekhov; and that is hard.

My point, let me hasten to add, is not that novelists need social theories or philosophical systems. They do, however, need to live in an environment about which they can make economical assumptions that, in some ultimate way, are related to the ideas of speculative thinkers. Let me borrow a useful distinction that C. Wright Mills makes between troubles and issues. Troubles signify a strong but unfocussed sense of disturbance and pain, while issues refer to troubles that have been articulated as general statements. Novelists, as a rule, concern themselves with troubles, not issues. But to write with as-

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surance and economy about troubles, they need to be working in a milieu where there is at least some awareness of issues. And in the troubled years after the Second World War it was precisely this awareness that was often lacking.

A few serious writers did try to fix in their novels the amorphous "troubledness" of postwar American experience. In *The Violated,* an enormous realistic narrative about some ordinary people who reach adulthood during the war, Vance Bourjailly seemed consciously to be dramatizing a view of American society quite similar to the one I have sketched here. He chose to write one of those full-scale narratives composed of parallel strands of plot—a technique which assumes that society is distinctly articulated, that its classes are both sharply visible and intrinsically interesting, and that a novelist can arrange a conflict between members of these classes which will be dramatic in its own right and emblematic of larger issues. But for the material Bourjailly chose—the lives of bewildered yet not uncharacteristic drifters during the past two decades—these assumptions could not operate with sufficient force; and as his characters, in the sameness of their misery, melted into one another, so the strands of his narrative, also having no inevitable reason for separate existence, collapsed into one another.

Norman Mailer, trying in *The Deer Park* to compose a novel about the malaise of our years, avoided the cumbersomeness of the traditional social novel but could find no other structure that would give coherence to his perceptions. Mailer tried to embody his keen if unstable vision in a narrative about people whose extreme dislocation of experience and feeling would, by the very fact of their extreme dislocation, come to seem significant. But in its effort to portray our drifting and boredom full-face, in its fierce loyalty to the terms of its own conception, *The Deer Park* tended to become a claustrophobic work, driving attention inward, toward its own tonal peculiarities, rather than outward, as an extending parable. Throughout the novel Mailer had to fall back upon his protagonist, through whom he tried to say that which he found hard to show.

IV

A whole group of novelists, among the best of recent years, has found itself responding to immediate American experience by choosing subjects and locales that are apparently far removed from that

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experience yet, through their inner quality, very close to it. These writers are sensitive to the moods and tones of postwar American life; they know that something new, different and extremely hard to describe has been happening to us. Yet they do not usually write about postwar experience *per se*: they do not confront it as much as they try to ambush it. The film critic Stanley Kaufmann has noted a similar phenomenon:

> When Vittorio de Sica was asked why so many of his films deal with adultery, he is said to have replied, "But if you take adultery out of the lives of the bourgeoisie, what drama is left?" It is perhaps this belief that has impelled Tennessee Williams into the areas that his art inhabits. He has recognized that most of contemporary life offers limited dramatic opportunities . . . so he has left "normal" life to investigate the highly neurotic, the violent and the grimy. It is the continuing problem of the contemporary writer who looks for great emotional issues to move him greatly. The anguish of the advertising executive struggling to keep his job is anguish indeed, but its possibilities in art are not large-scale. The writer who wants to "let go" has figuratively to leave the urban and suburban and either go abroad, go into the past, or go into those few pockets of elemental emotional life left in this country.

Abroad, the past, or the few pockets of elemental emotional life: —many of our best writers have pursued exactly these strategies in order to suggest their attitudes toward contemporary experience. In *The Assistant* Bernard Malamud has written a somber story about a Jewish family during the Depression years, yet it soon becomes clear that one of his impelling motives is a wish to recapture intensities of feeling we have apparently lost but take to be characteristic of an earlier decade. Herbert Gold's *The Man Who Was Not With It* is an account of marginal figures in a circus as they teeter on the edge of *lumpen* life; but soon one realizes that he means his story to indicate possibilities for personal survival in a world increasingly compressed. The precocious and bewildered boy in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* expresses something of the moral condition of adolescents today—or so they tell us; but clearly his troubles are not meant to refer to his generation alone. In *A Walk on the Wild Side* Nelson Algren turns to down-and-outers characteristic of an earlier social moment, but if we look to the psychic pressures breaking through the novel we see that he is really searching for a perspective for estrangement that will be relevant to our day. In *The*

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Field of Vision Wright Morris moves not backward in time but sideways in space: he contrives to bring a dreary Nebraskan middle-class family to a Mexican bull-fight so that the excitement of the blood and ritual will stir it to self-awareness. And while, on the face of it, Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* is a picaresque tale about a cocky Jewish boy moving almost magically past the barriers in American society, it is also a kind of paean to the idea of personal freedom in hostile circumstances. Bellow's most recent novel *Henderson the Rain King* seems an even wilder tale about an American millionaire venturing into deepest Africa, in part, the deepest Africa of boy's books; but when he writes that men need a shattering experience to "wake the spirit's sleep" we soon realize that his ultimate reference is to America, where many spirits sleep.

Though vastly different in quality, these novels have in common a certain obliqueness of approach. They do not represent directly the postwar American experience, yet refer to it constantly. They tell us rather little about the surface tone, the manners, the social patterns of recent American life, yet are constantly projecting moral criticisms of its essential quality. They approach that experience on the sly, yet are colored and shaped by it throughout. And they gain from it their true subject: the recurrent search—in America, almost a national obsession—for personal identity and freedom. In their distance from fixed social categories and their concern with the metaphysical implications of that distance, these novels constitute what I would call "post-modern" fiction.

But the theme of personal identity, if it is to take on fictional substance, needs some kind of placement, a setting in the world of practical affairs. And it is here that the "post-modern" novelists run into serious troubles: the connection between subject and setting cannot always be made, and the "individual" of their novels, because he lacks social definition and is sometimes a creature of literary or even ideological fiat, tends to be not very individualized. Some of the best postwar novels, like *The Invisible Man* and *The Adventures of Augie March,* are deeply concerned with the fate of freedom in a mass society; but the assertiveness of idea and vanity of style which creep into such books are the result, I think, of willing a subject onto a novel rather than allowing it to grow out of a sure sense of a particular moment and place. These novels merit admiration for defending the uniqueness of man's life, but they suffer from having

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to improvise the terms of this uniqueness. It is a difficulty that seems, at the moment, unavoidable and I have no wish to disparage writers who face it courageously. Still, it had better be said that the proclamation of personal identity in recent American fiction tends, if I may use a fashionable phrase, to be more a product of the will than of the imagination.

It may help strengthen my point—critics ought not to strengthen such points too much—if I turn for a moment to the two most-discussed literary groups of the last few years: the "angry young men" in England and the "beat generation" writers of San Francisco.

Partly because they write in and about England, Kingsley Amis, John Braine and John Wain are blessed with something utterly precious to a writer: a subject urgently, relentlessly imposing itself upon their imaginations. They have earned the scorn of a good many American critics—notable, of course, for asceticism—who point out that it is not clear whether it is a better or just a bigger share of the material and cultural goods in contemporary England that these writers want. But while you can feel righteous or even hostile toward Amis and Braine, you can hardly deny that in their novels one finds something of the focussed desire, the quick apprehension and notation of contemporary life which, for reasons I have tried to suggest, has become somewhat rare in serious American fiction. These English writers face a predicament of the welfare state: it rouses legitimate desires in people of the "lower orders"; it partly satisfies these desires; but it satisfies them only to the point of arousing new demands beyond its power of meeting. For society this may be irksome; for writers it is exhilarating. Gripes can be transformed into causes, ambitions cloaked as ideals. And the "angry young men" are particularly fortunate in that their complaints lead them to deal with some of the traditional materials of the novel: frustrated ambition, frozen snobbery, fake culture, decaying gentility. Through comedy they are able to *structure* their complaints. Their work touches upon sore spots in English life, hurting some people and delighting others. It threatens the Establishment, perhaps its survival, more likely its present leaders. It creates tension, opposition, a dialectic of interests. All of which is to say: it rests upon an articulated, coherent though limited vision of English social relations.

By contrast, the young men in San Francisco seem largely a

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reflex of the circumstances of mass society. They are suffering from psychic and social disturbance: and as far as that goes, they are right—there is much in American life to give one a pain. But they have no clear sense of why or how they are troubled, and some of them seem opposed in principle to a clear sense of anything. The "angry young men" in England, even if their protest will prove to be entirely opportunistic and momentary, can say what it is that hurts. The San Francisco writers fail to understand, as Paul Goodman has remarked, that

> It is necessary to have some contact with institutions and people in order to be frustrated and angry. They [the San Francisco writers] have the theory that to be affectless, not to care, is the ultimate rebellion, but this is a fantasy; for right under the surface is burning shame, hurt feelings, fear of impotence, speechless and powerless tantrum, cowering before papa, being rebuffed by mama; and it is these anxieties that dictate their behavior in every crisis.

These writers, I would contend, illustrate the painful, though not inevitable, predicament of rebellion in a mass society: they are the other side of the American hollow. In their contempt for mind, they are at one with the middle class suburbia they think they scorn. In their incoherence of feeling and statement, they mirror the incoherent society that clings to them like a mocking shadow. In their yearning to keep "cool," they sing out an eternal fantasy of the shopkeeper. Feeling themselves lonely and estranged, they huddle together in gangs, create a Brook Farm of Know-Nothings, and send back ecstatic reports to the squares: Having a Wonderful Time, Having Wonderful Kicks! But alas, all the while it is clear that they are terribly lost, and what is more pitiable, that they don't even have the capacity for improvising vivid fantasies. As they race meaninglessly back and forth across the continent, veritable mimics of the American tourist, they do not have a Wonderful Time. They do not get happily drunk, many of them preferring milk shakes and tea; and their sexual revelations, particularly in Kerouac's *The Subterraneans,* are as sad as they are unintentional. They can't, that is, dream themselves out of the shapeless nightmare of California; and for that, perhaps, we should not blame them, since it is not certain that anyone can.

No wonder, then, that in Kerouac's novels one is vaguely aware that somewhere, in the unmapped beyond, a society does exist: a so-

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ciety with forms, requirements, burdens, injustices, duties and pleasures; but that in the space of the novels themselves we can only find a series of distraught and compulsive motions. The themes of what I have called "post-modern" fiction are reflected in the San Francisco writers as caricature and symptom; for if you shun consciousness as if it were a plague, then a predicament may ravage you but you cannot cope with it.

Where finally does this leave us? In the midst, I hope, of the promise and confusion of American writing today. No settled ending is possible here, because the tendencies I have been noticing are still in flux, still open to many pressures and possibilities. But it may not be too rash to say that the more serious of the "post-modern" novelists—those who grapple with problems rather than merely betraying their effects—have begun to envisage that we may be on the threshhold of enormous changes in human history. These changes, merely glanced by the idea of the "mass society," fill our novelists with a sense of foreboding; and through the strategy of obliqueness, they bring to bear a barrage of moral criticisms, reminders of human potentiality, and tacit exhortations.

The possibilities that appear to them are those which struck at T.E. Lawrence when he returned from Arabia and discovered that he did not know how or why to live. One such possibility is that we are moving toward a quiet desert of moderation where men will forget the passion of moral and spiritual restlessness that has characterized Western society. That the human creature, no longer a Quixote or a Faust, will become a docile attendent to an automated civilization. That the "aura of the human" will be replaced by the nihilism of satiety. That the main question will no longer be the conditions of existence but existence itself. That high culture as we understand it will become increasingly problematical and perhaps reach some point of obsolescence.

But before such prospects—they form the bad dreams of thoughtful men, the nightmares our "post-modern" novelists are trying to exorcise—the mind grows dizzy and recalcitrant. It begins to solace itself with rumblings about eternal truths, and like the exacerbated judge in Faulkner's *The Hamlet,* cries out, "I can't stand no more . . . This case is adjourned!"

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POEMS

INHERITANCE AND DESCENT

O once when I was merely
The music of a passage,
The letters of a text,
My father loved me dearly,
And grew me from my grass age
Until my legs were sexed.

Rains wet his manuscript.
The notes fell from the staves,
The letters ran like waters,
Paternal music dripped,
My grass fell into graves.
I shall descend in daughters.

Clock in the blood, slow ticker,
Drown me in your dark sea.
Tide in whose arms flesh strives,
In eyes where fathers flicker
Make me more blind than thee,
Divide me among my wives.

After the skull-capped scholars,
Scatter me among women
In harems of winding hair,
Who clothe them in my dollars.
And lay me there, man brimming
Amid their golden stare.

Walter Stone

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"THEY DREAM ONLY OF AMERICA"

They dream only of America
To be lost among the thirteen million pillars of grass:
"This honey is delicious
Though it burns the throat."

And hiding from darkness in barns
They can be grownups now
And the murderer's ash tray is more easily—
The lake a lilac cube.

He holds a key in his right hand.
"Please," he asked willingly.
He is thirty years old.
That was before

We could drive hundreds of miles
At night through dandelions.
When his headache grew worse we
Stopped at a wire filling station

Now he cared only about signs.
Was the cigar a sign?
And what about the key?
He went slowly into the bedroom.

"I would not have broken my leg if I had not fallen
Against the living room table. What is it to be back
Beside the bed? There is nothing to do
For our liberation, except wait in the horror of it.

And I am lost without you."

John Ashbery

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MOONSET, GLOUCESTER, DECEMBER 1, 1957, 1:58 AM

Goodbye red moon
In that color you set
west of the Cut I should imagine
forever Mother

After 47 years this month
a Monday at 9 AM
you set I rise I hope
a free thing as probably
what you more were Not
the suffering one you sold
sowed me on Rise
Mother from off me
God damn you God damn me my
misunderstanding of you

I can die now I just begun to live

Charles Olson

MARCH SONG

At a bend in the stream by willows
I paused to be with the cattails
  their long flat leaves
and tall stems
bleached by wind and winter light

and winter had kept them
  edged down into the quiet eddy of the bend
tight with ice

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O willows I said how you return
gold to the nakedness of your limbs
coming again out of that country
into the longer sun

and Oh I said turning to the fluffy cattails
loosened to the approaching winds of spring
what a winter you leave in the pale stems
of your becoming

HYMN

Make lean the vowels of my lips
Do not let my words shimmer the placid
waters of your eternity
Leave my skull in the open the
wind can get to
saying the things the wind says curving round
the cool guidance of a bone

The sounds of the times do not drown
the nearly silenced fears
Let me relieving hear those fears speak
away from jangled roaring men

Who can be numbed by noise should hallow it
sounding in the violent obliteration of his fear
his lonely helpful decibel they say

You who cannot write simplify
the vocabulary of my eyes
Let me move into the fringe of silence
where my words may have their slow revolving birth
for a diary to your eyes
in the throats of silent men

A. R. Ammons

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FISHERMAN

The moon-bitch lies in the morning sky
over the tower face-down
and asleep.
Light wind comes off the sea and cools my behind
as I come up the mountain with fish,
while her bronze lover
blinds me from the opposite sky, her
fat, red-faced daddy-boy
watching her sleep in the dawn.

Performing a daily task, this climbing up,
I am caught in the poles of the world
entangled as if I were fish
and they held my nets between them.
My feet are slow on the steps.
Last night, I dreamed that the moon
stood on either side of me
and the sun lay cracked and broken
under the world
like an old axle-wheel. But there he is
beaming like a fat idiot
while that pale bitch sleeps on one arm
face down.

This evening, climbing these steps,
he will sit in the opposite sky and warm my can
which is more to my liking.
Flesh mends and grows firm in the sun.
That other was a malignant dream only
and a strange heaven.

Paul Blackburn

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THE UNDERSTUDIES

When summer smelled of green and stamens thrust
Their fluted horns into the pulsing air,
Under a nave of green the protagonist, crusted
And heavy with musty waddings of the grave,
And sour when all was yearning sweetness, fed his hair.
There underground it grew like rooted grass, it throve
On rust and spores and hung spikes before his stare.
While in the afternoons the lemon lilies spiced among the fern,
And the entangled cabbage rose wrapped his settled mound,
Our hero made ready, and in the lively phosphorous burn
And smolder of the working flesh, a hissing sound
Came to us there on the prickle of grasses, his man's flesh hissed
And called us, but we lay under the trees where the caterpillars fell,
Where the birds clipped and snipped, on the firm rock over his well,
And when the oriole said over and over the same canto, we kissed.

Ruth Stone

UNDER AND ABOVE GROUND CONVERSATIONS

The under and above ground conversations
Which are no worse than at any other period
Are sirens that warn me against
Retreating into silence. A burden birth,
An incomplete circle, speaks throughout
The symphony of generations.

Which station is right for whom?
It is no matter; others follow and speak.
Whose lament is in the sun?
Whose deceptions lead and finally end?
Answers in oilskins tramp platforms
And cafes talking. Weather, war and Grail.

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Leashed Europe rises, and stretching
Roars for a knife to free
The watch hounds that baited
With bones in a bush cannot hand
Or handle their hunger. Europe, caged
And fed, speaks for her hounds free
And hungry. One forbidden. A continent
With river veins and county hearts
Will cough and weep, fall and speak.

Coming from a lift or park conversations
continuing with the breath, will gabble
At themselves and you on yesterday, tomorrow.

John Fairfax

FROM THE ARCHIVES AT MARI

My lord, I write once again
to give you news of this outlying province:
There is a high wind, cutting cold, tonight,
it blows down from the mountains to the north,
where the jackals, as usual, are howling;
but no doubt you will recall,
from your last progress through these eastern parts,
how little the Weather God favors this climate,
despite our sacrifices each year of one ox and two sheep.

What harvest there was has long since been gathered in
and the old moon dies tonight across the valley pass
as I suppose she must be dying
above the stone walls of your capitol at Mari
where I commanded in your army for so many years.
Several captains, now that winter is coming on,
prepare for the long journey west to the sea people,
while I remain here at my post, in exile.

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My lord, as I wrote you before, my servants
some five days ago reported the appearance
of a royal beast—not a sphinx, as had been foretold—
but a young lion with amber eyes, here on a rooftop
in this very fortress. They've thrown him a dog,
at my orders, and a swine, to stay his hunger,
and he also eats bread. This lion, my lord,
may cause a panic among the people.

Hence again I pray you to send me the findings
of the royal diviners. If I try to cage him,
a man may lose his life. You must know,
my lord, this is a beast that eats men.
I write by fast runner, my noble lord—
this golden lion rages my life.

Note: The third stanza is based on the translation of a Hittite letter given on page 149 of C. W. Ceram's *The Secret of the Hittites* (New York, A. A. Knopf, 1955).

Stanley Read

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Lionel Trilling

A SPEECH ON ROBERT FROST: A CULTURAL EPISODE

On March 26th, Henry Holt and Company, the publishers of Robert Frost, gave Mr. Frost a dinner at the Waldorf-Astoria in celebration of his eighty-fifth birthday. I was the speaker at the dinner. I am publishing what I said about Mr. Frost not because I think it to be especially interesting in itself but because it made the occasion for a disturbance of some magnitude and I should like to answer the question that has often been put to me: What did I say that could so nearly have approached a scandal?

Some of the substance of my speech was made public by J. Donald Adams in his column in *The New York Times Book Review* of April 12th. Mr. Adams wrote from a copy of my manuscript which, with my permission, had been made available to him by Henry Holt and Company, and he reported with sufficient accuracy those parts of the speech to which he took exception. It should be said of Mr. Adams's reply to me that it took exception only to the critical judgment I had expressed. Mr. Adams did not question my taste or tact except in one small and perhaps facetious instance—he thought it "unfortunate . . . in view of Frost's shock of white hair," that I should have "identified the poet with the Bald Eagle." (But every American worthy of the name knows that the Bald Eagle is not bald at all and that in maturity it is distinguished by its shock of white hair.) Nevertheless the reply of Mr. Adams created the impression with some people that, so far from my having paid tribute to a venerable man at a celebration of his life and achievement, I had actually offered him an affront. I gather that the chief cause of the presumed offense was my having spoken of Mr. Frost as "a terrifying poet."

Certainly what I had said as reported by Mr. Adams offered an affront to some part of American opinion. It was a very deep affront if I can judge by the letters, published in the *Book Review*

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of April 26th, which applauded Mr. Adams for his reply to me. There were nine such letters and all of them sounded a note of bitterness, or of personal grievance, or of triumph over my having been so thoroughly taken down by Mr. Adams. I must confess to being surprised by the low personal and intellectual tone of these letters. My estimate of the present state of American culture had not prepared me for it. "Trilling doesn't have the good sense to know when he is out of his field or his depth or whatever it is." "Frost might have had the Nobel Prize if so many New York critics hadn't gone whoring after European gods." "This Trilling fella had it coming to him for some time." "I hope Robert Frost was having a nice plate of buckwheat cakes and Vermont maple syrup as he read Mr. Adams's remarks. He couldn't have done better unless he had taken the so-called professor out to the woodshed." "I am a Freudian psychoanalyst, but I couldn't agree with Mr. Adams more. Imagine calling Frost a 'terrifying poet.' Professor Trilling never got lost in the Freudian wood. He is just enmeshed in a Trilling world." (In his column Mr. Adams had urged me "to come out of the Freudian wood . . . and face the facts of life." It will be seen that I make no mention of Freud in my speech, but I do speak of D.H. Lawrence, and Mr. Adams said that Lawrence was a genius but hadn't understood "the American experience" because, like me, he was "lost in the Freudian wood." Lawrence, of course, hated Freud and took every occasion to denounce him.)

The personal and intellectual quality of the letters is especially interesting because of the professions of the people who wrote them: in addition to the "Freudian psychoanalyst," the writers included the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly,* the publisher of *The Saturday Review,* two fairly well-known poets, a member of the Federal Trade Commission, a well-known and quite literate writer of fiction and biography, a very distinguished literary scholar. Only one of the writers, Mr. Weeks of *The Atlantic Monthly,* knew at first hand, what I had said, having been present at the dinner. He expressed himself as finding my remarks "ill-judged and condescending for an occasion which was intended to be appreciative," and went on to say that "it would have been more appropriate had the introduction been entrusted to W.H. Auden, particularly in view of England's early acceptance of Frost's work, in which case we should have been spared the long Freudian self-analysis which few could have come to hear." All the other writers knew what I had said only from Mr. Adams's reply to it. That the literary scholar was among their number made a circumstance to which I couldn't fail to respond with some un-

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happiness, for I had first been Professor Emery Neff's student when I was an undergraduate at Columbia College and I had worked in his field and under his direction as a graduate student; I have always thought of Mr. Neff as the teacher from whom I had learned the methods and attitudes of the scholar; that he should so far have abrogated the rule and spirit of scholarship as to write in support of Mr. Adams's rebuke (as he chose to call it) without having seen the text of what I had said disturbed me deeply in a way I shall not now attempt to describe.

I have no doubt that the episode will yield cultural conclusions to whoever wants to draw them.

Because I am publishing the speech as a document, I give it exactly as I spoke it, not even mitigating the donnish humor of the opening paragraphs.

* * *

Mr. Rigg, Ladies and Gentlemen
(and I shall address Mr. Frost presently):

I am sure that anyone standing in my place to-night, charged with the happy office of greeting Mr. Frost on his birthday, on his massive, his Sophoclean birthday, would be bound to feel, as I do indeed feel, a considerable measure of diffidence.

For our occasion, although it isn't solemn, is surely momentous. We all of us know that we celebrate something that lies beyond even Mr. Frost's achievement as a poet. No person here tonight, no matter how high his regard for Mr. Frost as a poet may be, is under any illusion that Mr. Frost, at this point in his career, exists in the consciousness of Americans as only a poet. Just what he does exist as may perhaps be best understood by the archaeologists of a few milleniums hence. They will observe, those ardent students of our culture, how, at the time of the vernal equinox, feasts were held to celebrate the birth of this personage, and how, at a later time in the spring, at that ceremony which the ancient North Americans, with their infallible instinct for beauty, called by the lovely name of *Commencement,* it was customary to do him honor by a rite in which it was pretended that he was a scholar, a man of immense learning—a doctor—and no American university was thought to be worthy of the name until it had duly performed this rite, which was quaintly called *conferring a degree.* The time of year at which these ritual observances took place makes it plain to the archaeologists that they are almost certainly not dealing with an historical individual but

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rather with a solar myth, a fertility figure. They go on to expound the subtle process of myth which is to be observed in the fact that this vernal spirit was called *Frost,* a name which seems to contradict his nature and function. In their effort to explain this anomaly, they take note of evidence which suggests that the early North Americans believed that there were once two brothers, Robert Frost and Jack Frost, of whom one, Jack, remained unregenerate and hostile to mankind, while the other brother became its friend. But of course the archaeologists understand that this is a mere folk-explanation which explains nothing. They say, cogently enough, that mythical figures often embody contradictory principles, that just as Apollo was both destroyer and preserver, so Robert Frost was at one and the same time both ice and sun, and they point to a dark saying attributed to him: "Like a piece of ice on a hot stove, the poem must ride on its own melting."

Thus the ultimate myth. It tells us much about the nature of Robert Frost and I am glad to be able to communicate it to you.

But there is also the myth that is nearer at hand. We do not need to wait upon the archaeologists of the future to understand that Robert Frost exists not only in a human way but also in a mythical way. We know him, and have known him so for many years, as nothing less than a national fact. We have come to think of him as virtually a symbol of America, as something not unlike an articulate, an actually poetic, Bald Eagle. When we undertake to honor him, we do indeed honor him as a poet, but also as a tutelary genius of the nation and as a justification of our national soul.

This mythical existence of Robert Frost determines the nature of our occasion and makes it momentous. It substantiates my statement that anyone who speaks publicly about Mr. Frost tonight must do so under the constraints of an extreme diffidence.

Yet I must be more weighed down by diffidence than many others who might speak here. I must almost entertain a doubt of the appropriateness of my speaking here at all. For I cannot help knowing that the manifest America of Robert Frost's poems is not the America that has its place in my own mind. The manifest America of Mr. Frost's poems is rural, and, if I may say so, it is rural in a highly moralized way, in an aggressively moralized way. It thus represents an ideal that is common to many Americans, perhaps especially to Americans of the literary kind, who thus express their dis-

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taste for the life of the city and for all that the city implies of excessive complexity, of uncertainty, of anxiety, and of the demand that is made upon intellect to deal with whatever are the causes of complexity, uncertainty, anxiety.

I do not share this ideal. It is true that the image of the old America has a great power over me—that old America with which the America of Mr. Frost's poems seems to be continuous. And I think I know from experience—there are few Americans who do not—how intense can be the pleasure in the hills and the snow, in the meadows and woods and swamps that make the landscape of Mr. Frost's manifest America; and know, too, how great a part this pleasure can play in a man's moral being. But these natural things that give me pleasure constitute my notion of the earthly paradise, they are not the ruling elements of my imagination of actual life. Those elements are urban—I speak here tonight incongruously as a man of the city. I teach in an urban university. The magazine I most enjoy writing for is *Partisan Review,* to which, as I know, there is often imputed an excess of city intellectuality, even to the point of its being thought scarcely American at all.

Of course I have imagination enough to hate the city. And of course I have sensibility enough to be bored and exasperated by the intellectual life that is peculiar to the city, not only as that is lived by others but by myself. But to the essential work that is done by the critical intellect (I use the term in its widest sense), that work which, wherever it is carried on, must sooner or later relate itself to the metropolis or must seek, wherever it is carried on, to create around itself the intensity and variety that traditionally characterize the intellectual life of the metropolis—to that work I give a partisan devotion. I know all that can be charged against the restless, combative, abstract urban intellect: I know perhaps more than is known by its avowed antagonists. I also know that when it flags, something goes out of the nation's spirit, and that if it were to cease, the state of the nation would be much the worse.

It is a fact which I had best confess as simply as possible that for a long time I was alienated from Mr. Frost's great canon of work by what I saw in it, that either itself seemed to denigrate the work of the critical intellect or that gave to its admirers the ground for making the denigration. It was but recently that my resistance, at the behest of better understanding, yielded to admiration—it is

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probable that there is no one here to-night who has not admired Mr. Frost's poetry for a longer time than I have.

This will begin to explain why I am so especially diffident standing in this place. I have yet more to confess. I have to say that my Frost—*my Frost*: what airs we give ourselves when once we believe that we have come into possession of a poet!—I have to say that my Frost is not the Frost I seem to perceive existing in the minds of so many of his admirers. He is not the Frost who confounds the characteristically modern practice of poetry by his notable democratic simplicity of utterance: on the contrary. He is not the Frost who controverts the bitter modern astonishment at the nature of human life: the opposite is so. He is not the Frost who reassures us by his affirmation of old virtues, simplicities, pieties, and ways of feeling: anything but. I will not go so far as to say that my Frost is not essentially an American poet at all: I believe that he is quite as American as everyone thinks he is, but not in the way that everyone thinks he is.

In the matter of the Americanism of American literature one of my chief guides is that very remarkable critic, D. H. Lawrence. Here are the opening sentences of Lawrence's great outrageous book about classic American literature. "We like to think of the old fashioned American classics as children's books. Just childishness on our part. The old American art speech contains an alien quality which belongs to the American continent and to nowhere else." And this unique alien quality, Lawrence goes on to say, the world has missed. "It is hard to hear a new voice," he says, "as hard as to listen to an unknown language. . . . Why? Out of fear. The world fears a new experience more than it fears anything. It can pigeonhole any idea. But it can't pigeonhole a real new experience. It can only dodge. The world is a great dodger, and the Americans the greatest. Because they dodge their own very selves." I should like to pick up a few more of Lawrence's sentences, feeling the freer to do so because they have an affinity to Mr. Frost's prose manner and substance: "An artist is usually a damned liar, but his art, if it be art, will tell you the truth of his day. And that is all that matters. Away with eternal truth. Truth lives from day to day. . . . The old American artists were hopeless liars. . . . Never trust the artist. Trust the tale. The proper function of the critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it. . . . Now listen to me, don't listen to him. He'll tell you the lie you expect, which is partly your fault for expecting it."

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Now in point of fact Robert Frost is *not* a liar. I would not hesitate to say that he was if I thought he was. But no, he is not. In certain of his poems—I shall mention one or two in a moment—he makes it perfectly plain what he is doing; and if we are not aware of what he is doing in other of his poems, where he is not quite so plain, that is not his fault but our own. It is not from him that the tale needs to be saved.

I conceive that Robert Frost is doing in his poems what Lawrence says the great writers of the classic American tradition did. That enterprise of theirs was of an ultimate radicalism. It consisted, Lawrence says, of two things: a disintegration and sloughing off of the old consciousness, by which Lawrence means the old European consciousness, and the forming of a new consciousness underneath.

So radical a work, I need scarcely say, is not carried out by reassurance, nor by the affirmation of old virtues and pieties. It is carried out by the representation of the terrible actualities of life in a new way. I think of Robert Frost as a terrifying poet. Call him, if it makes things any easier, a tragic poet, but it might be useful every now and then to come out from under the shelter of that literary word. The universe that he conceives is a terrifying universe. Read the poem called "Design" and see if you sleep the better for it. Read "Neither Out Far nor In Deep," which often seems to me the most perfect poem of our time, and see if you are warmed by anything in it except the energy with which emptiness is perceived.

But the *people,* it will be objected, the *people* who inhabit this possibly terrifying universe! About them there is nothing that can terrify; surely the people in Mr. Frost's poems can only reassure us by their integrity and solidity. Perhaps so. But I cannot make the disjunction. It may well be that ultimately they reassure us in some sense, but first they terrify us, or should. We must not be misled about them by the curious tenderness with which they are represented, a tenderness which extends to a recognition of the tenderness which they themselves can often give. But when ever have people been so isolated, so lightning-blasted, so tried down and calcined by life, so reduced, each in his own way, to some last irreducible core of being. Talk of the disintegration and sloughing off of the old consciousness! The people of Robert Frost's poems have done that with a vengeance. Lawrence says that what the Americans refused to accept was "the post-Renaissance humanism of Europe," "the old Euro-

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pean spontaneity," "the flowing easy humor of Europe" and that seems to me a good way to describe the people who inhabit Robert Frost's America. In the interests of what great other thing these people have made this rejection we cannot know for certain. But we can guess that it was in the interest of truth, of some truth of the self. This is what they all affirm by their humor (which is so *not* "the easy flowing humor of Europe"), by their irony, by their separateness and isolateness. They affirm *this* of themselves: that they are what they are, that this is their truth, and that if the truth be bare, as truth often is, it is far better than a lie. For me the process by which they arrive at that truth is always terrifying. The manifest America of Mr. Frost's poems may be pastoral; the actual America is tragic.

And what new consciousness is forming underneath? That I do not know, possibly because I have not been long enough habituated to the voice that makes the relatively new experience I am having. I am still preoccupied with the terrifying process of the disintegration and sloughing off of the old consciousness.

Mr. Frost:

I hope that you will not think it graceless of me that on your birthday I have undertaken to say that a great many of your admirers have not understood clearly what you have been doing in your life in poetry. I know that you will not say which of us is in the right of the matter. You will behave like the Secret whose conduct you have described:

> *We dance around in a ring and suppose.*
> *But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.*

And I hope that you will not think it graceless of me that on your birthday I have made you out to be a poet who terrifies. When I began to speak I called your birthday Sophoclean and that word has, I think, controlled everything I have said about you. Like you, Sophocles lived to a great age, writing well; and like you, Sophocles was the poet his people loved most. Surely they loved him in some part because he praised their common country. But I think that they loved him chiefly because he made plain to them the terrible things of human life: they felt, perhaps, that only a poet who could make plain the terrible things could possibly give them comfort.

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Delmore Schwartz

THE GIFT

It was something special. Mother had said it was, Father had said so too, and dear Vera too. It was an honor like the gold paper stars the teacher gave for excellent deportment and 100% in arithmetic.

Once before Toby had been sent downtown to Macy's department store to return a package and get back the purchase price. And he was very proud then, in the subway and the grownups had looked at him: they must have known that he was being trusted to travel by himself all the way downtown in the subway and back to bring a purchase back to Macy's department store.

And once before, long ago, dear Vera the servant maid (who came from Poland and wanted to go back to Poland as soon as she had enough money for a husband and to buy a farm) had put him on the train of the Long Island Railroad to the seashore where Grandma lived in the summer when it was too hot. But he was not big enough to be trusted because Vera spoke to the conductor who smiled at him when he passed on the way to the seashore, picking up tickets, clicking them.

This time was different and more important. He jingled his coins in his pocket because someone might hear and know he had money and was big enough to be trusted with silver, and brave enough to travel by himself in the subway where it was always roaring. He was going all the way to Brooklyn, the borough where he was born so long ago he could not remember: Vera said that no one ever was able to remember that, but she might be wrong. All the way to Brooklyn, under the river into the tunnel where it was like going up in the elevator in Father's office building which was

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a throbbing in his ears until the express elevator reached the 44th floor.

It was Martha's birthday and Isabel would be there too who liked him very much, he knew for sure, and Buck Thomas too, who hated him because Isabel liked to play post office with him and did not like Buck Thomas at all. If they played post office, he would get a kiss from Isabel and another one if he went to the kitchen with Isabel to bring back more ice cream and cake.

He saw the subway kiosk ahead, it was just like the German helmet Uncle William had brought him back from France, except it had a spike in it, and he saw the big clock next to it and the little wooden newsstand. He walked down the steps and carefully thrust his nickel into the turnstile, afraid it might get stuck, and pushed the gate too soon and felt panicky, but then when he pushed a little more slowly it gave way, swung and clicked and he stood on the platform, near the pillar, as the train came roaring in like summer thunder in the upstate mountains.

Mother and Vera had told him to be sure he took the train which said New Lots Avenue or he would not get to Brooklyn and the birthday party.

The only thing wrong was that he had no birthday present and he didn't because they had decided that it was all right for him to go to the party alone, only in the morning at breakfast time and it was a Sunday, so no stores except the stationery store were open and there he could buy something which Mother thought would be improper as a birthday present for a girl, a toy baseball game which he had looked at for a very long time in the plate glass window, but Mother said that baseball was only for lunatics and fanatics.

He looked up at the advertisements above the seats on the other side of the aisle and began to feel more and more ashamed that he had no present, all the other children would have presents to give to Martha, it would be just like that time in school last year when all the other children gave Miss Swenson Christmas presents, but he had no present to give because Mother had allowed him to give Miss Swenson the Thanksgiving candy father had sent him when he was on the road or coming back again from Chicago: so he was ashamed twice, because he saw the look on Miss Swenson's face when she opened the box of candy and saw it was all children's candy, chicken

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feed, black licorice, gumdrops, lollipops, and taffy and then he knew he should not have given her a present of children's candy. He was more ashamed then than when he had nothing to give her at Christmas because at Christmas Mother said that he had already given teacher a present, one gift was enough, which was not what father would have said if he had not been on the road again.

One of the advertisements was about God and his army and he might try praying to God, but maybe it was not right to ask him for a present now that he was already on the train on the way to Brooklyn. Mother said that there was a God and Father said when he asked him that he would have to decide for himself and Vera went to Church every Sunday morning and she was sure that there was a God and she spoke of God as being very kind, not like Mother who kept on saying that God would punish him for being a bad boy.

Once Mother and Father had an argument about whether or not there was a God and Father said that Mother had only a personal God just for herself. God was supposed to give you what you prayed for if you were a good boy but you could never be sure about being good and only God himself knew whether or not you were good.

"Dear God," he prayed, moving his lips and almost speaking until a lady next to him looked at him, "please give me a present for Martha, even if I am not a good boy I know that Martha is good, at least I think she is a good girl."

Isabel told him the last time he was in Brooklyn that Martha had been sent to bed without supper twice in a row but sometimes Isabel made things up and did not know she was making them up. Even if God did not answer his prayer and give him a gift for Martha, it would not show that there was no God but it might mean that Isabel was right and Martha was not a good girl. Also it was so long since he had seen Martha, it was more than five weeks, it was before Christmas, so Martha might have been any old way and he would not know about it.

He was probably being a dumbbell just like the boys in Junior High said he was but one of them said to another that maybe this dumbbell might turn out to be one of those sharks. Of course he kept being skipped and promoted into Rapid Advance classes.

God would have quite a lot of trouble in getting a birthday present for him now that he was in the subway with the train racing

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and roaring on the long express run from 96th to 72nd to 59th and Columbus Circle. Isabel was a Catholic girl and she always promised to tell him secrets of the church and then when she got what she wanted—candy or a toy—she would refuse to tell him because she said it was not really a promise, she had taken it back under her breath.

Isabel would say it was a dumb idea to ask God for a present when he was in the subway but it was like God opening up the Red Sea and dividing it in half so that his chosen people could get away from the Egyptians who were chasing them in chariots, the Sunday School teacher said, but lots of the boys in Sunday School said it was just a fairy tale.

It was easy to get mixed up about God and about the things the Sunday School teacher told the class and once it started an argument when he came home from Sunday School for the first time and Uncle Robert who was a banker and Aunt Anne were here from Chicago and they asked him what they had taught him in Sunday School. He told them that he did not remember very much but Uncle Robert kept asking him just as everyone began on the soup, so he said that the teacher told him all about what God does, God protects everyone who is weak and helpless and poor. Uncle Robert looked disgusted and Father began to choke on his soup and Mother said, "Toby!" which meant "shut up." That was when he was six years old and just a baby, he would know better now. But how could he know that he was saying something peculiar which one ought not to say to a banker? Uncle Robert kept after him and became angry and asked him whether the teacher had taught him that God made the earth and waters. Then Mother said, "Robert!" and she was angry at Uncle Robert and Father laughed so much that he thought it was like when Father took him to the pictures where they saw Charlie.

God was like being born, it was very hard to understand anything about God. When he was a baby still and went to kindergarten he thought it was the stork that brought the baby and he looked out at night to see if storks were flying in the sky over where Dr. Young lived. Vera had been born on a farm and she said babies grow like the trees from the earth and then there are flowers in May and the bees come and then there are fruits in August and September. But this was not the way that city babies were born because they were

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born all year long. He asked his father once when there was company and Father said he always thought it was the stork who brought the flowers of Spring. Everyone laughed but Toby. He did not like jokes which he could not understand. He asked Father if storks did not bring babies too and Father said that there were not enough storks to take care of all the babies of all the married couples, and there were more marriages than storks and everyone laughed again but Toby and Father said, because he seemed to be enjoying himself, that a new baby arrived every six seconds in the city of greater New York and there was no evidence that there were any storks sufficient for the growing population. But that must have been a joke too: if there were enough ambulances for all the babies there might be enough storks just for the babies especially because the grownups need ambulances too.

Vera said that there was a God and Vera was very smart too and she never told lies, she was not as smart as Mother and Father but Mother and Father did not always tell the truth to him or to each other. Vera taught him arithmetic quicker than the teacher taught the class in school. Vera prayed for her family in Poland and she told him how to pray, you must get down on your knees and close your eyes and you must mean what you say because no one can fool God. He could not get down on his knees in the subway or else everyone would think he was sick but maybe it would make no difference if he just prayed with his lips. Father and Mother did not pray or if they did they kept it a secret but still they had everything they wanted without praying while Vera who prayed all the time did not have enough money to go back to Poland and the farm she came from and she said she would not have enough for at least three years and sometimes Toby heard her cry in her room because she was so lonesome.

He was sure he was making a mistake about Vera's prayers because God knew best, Vera said. He always made mistakes because he thought too much and did not get things straight like the time Father and Mother took him to the moving-pictures because it was Vera's night out: on the way they passed the Deaf and Dumb Academy and he read the name on the sign and he shouted out: "Deaf and dumb! Deaf and dumb! Deaf and dumb!" at the top of his voice until his father stopped him.

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"They can't hear me, they're deaf and dumb," Toby said to Father. "How could they hear if they're deaf and dumb?"

Father said: "The people who run the Deaf and Dumb Academy can hear you yelling and bellowing." Father smiled but he was angry.

"But they're not deaf and dumb, so why should they mind?" Toby said to Father.

"What a logical monster we have spawned!" Father said, turning towards Mother. Then he said, "Just don't yell, Toby, if you don't mind," and then he said to Mother, "I suppose he'll grow up to be a shyster lawyer."

Mother did not like that. She said to Father, that he was being mean to Toby so Father said to Toby in a nice voice, that there was a proverb, a very old saying, that anyone who was wholly clever was half a fool. Just before they came to the theater Toby asked Mother what was logical and Mother told him that being logical was like arithmetic and that he was being logical when he said that being deaf and dumb was something which would not make the doctors and nurses in the Deaf and Dumb Academy mad when he shouted out the way he had just shouted out. It was logical that they should not be mad but that was not the way people's feelings worked. They became mad whether they had any logical right to become mad or not. Father said, "Your mother is right. Being logical is also being someone who loves to argue all the time." So Toby said, "You and Mother argue all the time, don't you?" So Father said, "You see what a logician he is! What a logical rascal!" Then he said to Toby, "The reason most people are logical is because they get mad and are trying to hurt somebody's feelings. Now no more discussion of the topic for several days to come."

He still did not know what logical was but from the way Father said it, it was not a very nice thing to be and he did not like it when Mother and Father would argue even though they did so behind closed doors most of the time.

Bedford Avenue was the next stop. Toby got up and got out of the train when it stopped and walked up the steps and looked for the taxi he had been told to take to get to Martha's house. The taxi-driver asked him if he had the money and Toby showed him the dollar Father had given him. Then he got into the taxi and the taxi was soon going down the big street where the streetcar ran. Another

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taxi turned in suddenly and hit the taxi's fender in front and it all happened so quickly that Toby did not have time to get scared. The taxi-driver got out and looked like he was going to get into a fight with the other taxi-driver.

"Guys like you ought to be in jail," the taxi-driver yelled at the other taxi-driver. "I'll beat the living daylight out of you, you little draft dodger. I'm a veteran. I was taking potshots at the Germans when you were cleaning up." They stood like that yelling at each other, getting closer all the time, their eyes bulging. "Just say that again," said the taxi-driver to the other taxi-driver, "Just say that again." Toby burst into tears and got out of the taxi. He was afraid he would get lost although he had the address of the house where Isabel lived. "Just look what you've done to this kid," said Toby's taxi-driver to the other one. "Oh, I did that too, I did that too," said the other driver and just then a few people and a cop came along and when Toby saw the cop he thought that he would never get to the party on time and he began to cry again.

"Which of you guys made this kid cry?" the cop asked the two taxi-drivers. Both of them said nothing at all in answer. Toby felt he couldn't stop crying anymore.

"Look Kid," said the cop, "you see this box I have? It's a present for one of my own kids. I'll give it to you if you want it and if you stop crying. You might not want to because it's for a little girl but maybe you have a sister." Toby stopped crying and started to gulp and hiccup.

"I would like to have the box, Officer," said Toby.

The cop gave Toby the box and told the two taxi-drivers to take each other's license numbers and beat it. Toby got back into the cab, holding the box and wondering about his prayer.

Soon the cab-driver stopped at the brownstone house where Martha's birthday party was and Toby gave him the dollar he had been told to give the taxi-driver. "Thank you, kid. That was a pretty nice cop, wasn't it?" the driver said. As he got out of the cab he was afraid that it might have been wrong to take the box because then the cop's little girl would not get it and she might have been praying for it. He would ask Vera because she would really tell him whether it was wrong to take the present even though he had prayed for it. He would tell Vera about how God had answered

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his prayer and had made the box a present for the little girl and not for a boy. He wanted to open the box and see what was in it but that would spoil the fancy wrapping-paper. He stopped in front of the door of the brownstone house because he suddenly remembered that his prayer had been answered only after a taxi had bumped into another taxi, and a big fight had started and he had started to cry like a big baby and a sissy. It might be dangerous to pray for presents but anyway he was sure now that there was a God. He rang the door bell and began to think of how proud he would be when he gave Martha her present and he told Isabel all the things that had happened when he had been allowed to go by himself to the Borough of Brooklyn where he had been born so long ago.

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LONDON LETTER

THE DEBUTANTE INTELLECTUALS

The one dominant fact of the English winter is 'flu. And winter, in England, lasts from late October until the end of April. In all that time the sun may shine pallidly now and then, or the fog may muffle the scene enough to give an appearance almost of mildness, but no one is ever quite well. That withdrawn air for which the English are famous is not reserve; it is simply preoccupation. They are wondering, all the time, when their next draught of patent cough medicine, their next encapsulated dose of quinine and cinnamon is due, how many aspirins they have taken with the mid-morning tea, where on earth they left their pocket inhalant. This year the scourge took on a new form: instead of ordinary 'flu, which knocks you out for a week and then goes, there was an unexpected variation, intermittent 'flu. It knocked you down, let you get up, and then knocked you flat again. And so on for weeks on end. It passed meaninglessly around like some devaluated currency. Bosses would hand it across the desk to their secretaries. The secretaries would mind it a few days and then pass it dutifully back again. One B.B.C. talks producer and his secretary kept the game going for nearly three months. But whether or not this is an official record I cannot say.

Precious little manages to break through the 'flu barrier. In literature particularly all has been very quiet. The only real poetic events are American importations: Robert Lowell's new volume, *Life Studies,* and a collection, at last, of John Berryman's poetry, which before was virtually and shamefully unknown in England. Both books are not only important in themselves, they are also useful, though perhaps painful, reminders that somewhere, somehow, standards of excellence still exist; that poets write because they have original things to say and original ways in which to say them. The reminder came at a critical moment: the Tory craze for the poems of John Betjeman having run its extraordinary course (the only sane comment on it came from Betjeman himself: "I am," he remarked, "the Ella Wheeler Wilcox of the Nineteen-Fifties."), the machinery of the Left began to grind into motion to push a specious but wholly unoriginal Marxist pasticheur called

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Christopher Logue. Logue is a kind of Allen Ginsberg at an earlier stage of development—his imagery is predominantly anal—whose master is not Whitman but Brecht. He imitates Brecht, however, at a significant remove: it is one thing to sound like Brecht and quite another to sound like Brecht in translation; much as I admire the work of Professor Eric Bentley, I see no reason why he should be set up as a model of poetic style. Like Ginsberg, Logue belongs, as Doctor Leavis said of the Sitwells, "more to the history of publicity than to the history of poetry." Like Ginsberg, too, he is a useful safety valve for the guilt feelings of the younger Establishment. Chelsea is full of young men and women who have moved from Oxford and Cambridge into rather plush jobs in advertizing, publishing and the administrative reaches of the Civil Service. They are the British equivalent of the young Madison Avenue executives. But they find it hard to reconcile Oxbridge humanitarian individualism with the sleazier intricacies of London business. So they vote Labour and anxiously follow "the latest thing" in art. Their Mecca is the Royal Court Theatre, which is nicely poised, in Sloane Square, between smart-set Belgravia and socialite-bohemian Chelsea. Admittedly, the Royal Court has done excellent work in putting on and making financial successes of new and at first not obviously money-making plays: John Osborne's, Beckett's, Brecht's, Ionesco's, and so on. But it has, unfortunately, become a kind of young Establishment fetish. The audience is always flush with a terrible, pleased air of being in the know. Their criterion is not the quality of the work, but the degree to which it appears advanced and to which it attacks the Establishment. Logue gauged this feeling peculiarly well when he staged an amusing anti-Establishment playlet preceded by a poetry-jazz reading. The reaction to the latter was typical: the reviewers almost unanimously congratulated Logue on thinking up the idea of reading verse to jazz. Originality, apparently, begins only at the Royal Court. No doubt the San Francisco jazzmen and poets will be glad to hear that the medium they have been experimenting with for so long has at last been officially invented.

I cite this otherwise trivial case merely as an exemple of the fashion machine at work. What is depressing about it is the basic similarity of criteria between the Old Hacks' Brigade and the young Debutante-Intellectuals of Chelsea. Neither are interested in value, in originality, in significance, in the depth and range of experience; they are interested only in fashion-appeal and useful slogans. Translated into poetry, this means a new craze for what might be called First-Sight Verse, work that yields up its meaning on first glance, like a novel, and which

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embodies certain ready-made attitudes of which one unthinkingly approves. Left-Wing or Right-Wing, the forces of reaction seem, fundamentally, one. They are united by the same stonewall resistance to originality.

The Debutante-Intellectuals seem also to have been plaguing the talented John Osborne in his musical *The World of Paul Slickey*. Whatever Osborne does, the public response is bound to be excessive. This time the daily press got together and performed on him the most vicious and unanimous hatchet-job I can remember. As Mr. Osborne's musical attacked everything, but above all the gutter press and the church, the treatment—from the gutter press and from respectable, churchly papers like *The Times*—was the least he could expect. In all fairness, *Paul Slickey* is not good, though it might have been immensely improved had Osborne not directed the thing himself. An outside producer could have cut away much of the waste material with which the show was cluttered without feeling, as Osborne must have done, that he was doing some obscure injury to himself. But it is not nearly as bad as the reviewers suggested, and a good deal better than the average Twenties-and-water slop that is usually served up as musical comedy in this country. The wolfish vindictiveness with which the press turned on Osborne was unpleasant enough in itself but, I suppose, inevitable; theatrical malice comes off on everyone connected with the stage, even on the journalists on the other side of the footlights. But it also shows the extraordinary resentment which the old hacks harbour for the young man's success. After all, the Osborne vogue was largely made and even more largely used by the journalists. The myth of the Angry Young Man was wholly their creation, a haphazard grouping-together of unlike, mutually unsympathetic writers, for the convenience of the newspaper men. They cashed in on the A.Y.M.s quite as much as the A.Y.M.s cashed in on the free publicity. As Osborne's young success figure remarks to a journalist. "You drink, therefore I am." Unfortunately, Osborne's reputation, like his legendary income, was becoming a little unmanageable. He was clearly able to subsist without the help of the press. So he was in for trouble. The interesting question is not why he was panned but whether or not he would have been panned had *Paul Slickey* been better.

But to return to the Debutante-Intellectuals: the trouble with *Paul Slickey* was that in it Osborne appeared to have accepted their image of himself. He gave the impression of playing a part he has been willed into rather than writing to please himself. In *Slickey* he is not so much the dramatist as the mere attacker, the man who makes dis-

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respectful comments about the sacred cows of Conservative England. The major fault in the work—the minor flaws are its length, haphazard plot, poor music and lyrics—is the superficial smartness of its "anger." Osborne has ceased to deal with human beings and is here content with shadowy types: the county, the well-heeled, the flash. He may not like them, but he has nothing to offer in their place; Slickey's yearning for decency is as vague and superficial as the evils he attacks. I suspect the musical was prompted by Osborne's wandering guilt at his own enormous success, his not quite realized anxieties on finding himself with a great deal of money in a smart set he certainly does not like and probably does not understand. So he has become preoccupied with smartness as a value in itself until it has dictated the whole tone of the musical. One hopes the phase is only transitory, that Osborne is not on the way to becoming a Noel Coward of Socialism, but is simply casting around for a route back to the more impersonal, unsmart world of creative activity.

Mercifully, smartness is not everywhere this spring. The Stratford season opened with the first appearance there of the magnificent Paul Robeson in *Othello*. The production, by the Royal Court's smartest young director, Tony Richardson, is wretchedly mannered in the fashionable no-lights-all-prose style. Iago is smartened up in another way; Sam Wanamaker plays him as a kind of West Side Story tough, all grimaces and mumbled lines. But Robeson, thank heaven, has none of this. He is perhaps the least "smart" man in the theater. The non-political springs of his work are pride and indignation. And he has interpreted Othello in precisely that way: as a question of race and honor, not of sexual jealousy. One may not agree with this as an interpretation of Shakespeare's play, but as *Robeson's* play there is no arguing with it. The strength and command of the man and the dignity of his acting are such that one might as well argue with Jehovah.

Robeson has appeared opportunely. Once again racial tensions have led to violence in the sad Notting Hill area. A Negro was knifed to death—though more for his money, it is suggested, than for his color. But the crime set off a great trail of accusations: against the Teddy Boys who do the dirty work; against the various organizations that inspire them, from the League of Empire Loyalists to the Mosleyites, the British Fascists who are once again surprisingly active—Mosley, in fact, is threatening to stand for Parliament for North Kensington at the next election; against the exploiting landlords who have been buying up property in the area and then packing in Negro families in considerable squalor and at exorbitant rents; against, finally, the usually impeccable London police, who have been accused of racial partiality of such pro-

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portions that the Negroes have asked the Home Secretary for permission to form a special constabulary of their own. The comments are all obvious, and the British press has already made them about Little Rock. But it is typical of contemporary England that the issue, which has aroused enormous general indignation, should also be entirely non-political. The only real concern nowadays is aroused over matters which have nothing to do with party politics.

The other and moving example is the Aldermaston march. In the Easter of 1958, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament organized a protest march against atomic weapons and atomic tests. It was a small scale affair. A couple of thousand marchers left Trafalgar Square on Good Friday. On Easter Monday about a thousand arrived at the Atomic Energy Authority's experimental station at Aldermaston. About three hundred had marched all the 53 miles between. This year the march was repeated, but in reverse, from Aldermaston back to London, and the numbers had been multiplied roughly by ten. At least five thousand people started, three thousand marched all the way, and twenty thousand finished in Trafalgar Square. The marchers, who came from all over England and from nearly every country, ate in the fields, slept in schoolrooms, drill-halls, gymnasiums and town halls, and they slogged through a whole day of steady rain. Sympathizers along the way put them up and allowed them, during the day, to use their bathrooms. The police shepherded them gently and shooed away the one car with a loudspeaker that protested against them. A few Teddy Boys made ribald comments as they passed. One elderly lady, unable to reach the bar of her local when the marchers flooded in, accused them of being Russians. Someone else started the rumour that they were paid 2s.6d. a head (about 35¢) by the C.P. I am told that the money, to date, has not been forthcoming.

But the march was, in fact, strictly non-political. No party banners or slogans were allowed; the speeches in Trafalgar Square stuck to the avowed subject, the Bomb; and above all, a very high percentage of the marchers were young. And it is extraordinary the degree to which the younger English have no politics at all. The march was simply a moral protest. Its end was not political, hardly even useful. It was cathartic. Blisters apart, the marchers gained nothing from their four days on the road, except the satisfaction that if they are all blown up by official idiocy and if their grandchildren come into the world deformed and sick, at least they have made a protest. It will have happened without their consent. In a way, the Aldermaston march was a

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huge gesture of individuality against the blank and passive anonymity of mass society.

It has created a kind of moral freemasonry. In the weeks following, one was always hearing "Were you on it?" or "How far did you go?" The "it" never had to be explained. There was a strange moral and emotional solidarity among the marchers. It had nothing to do with politics and a great deal to do with the emotional pressures in England. The Aldermaston march was the most effective and binding release of resentment against bureaucratic inanity that has occurred in a decade almost entirely given over to resentment and protest.

Of course, the exhibitionists made the most of the occasion. Last year the poet I mentioned earlier in this letter organized a little group which marched under a banner inscribed "Friends of Christopher Logue Unite." None of them, apparently, saw the joke. This year certain young ladies from Chelsea—the Debutante-Intellectuals again—dressed themselves up in cossack hats and marched barefoot, sucking pipes, in front of a battery of press cameras. Mercifully they were rare, though numerous enough to gain the march a kind of publicity that has almost persuaded the organizers not to stage it again next Easter. Alas, even the hydrogen bomb is not an effective deterrent weapon against certain compulsive neuroses.

But there was one official recognition of the vast crowd who gathered in Trafalgar Square. A few days later in the House of Commons Aneurin Bevan promised to stop nuclear tests if and when the Labour Party got back into power. His statement could hardly have come later in the day, but it was better than nothing. Some weeks after that, however, came the local elections for Borough Councils. Throughout the country, the vote swung heavily in favor of Conservatives—perhaps for the first time since Suez. So Labour gauged the strength of feeling about the H-bomb too late to make any difference. We are back where we started, with merely a public protest to the country's credit. In all fairness to the Conservatives, there are no British atomic tests being carried out at the moment.

A. Alvarez

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Kingsley Widmer

POETIC NATURALISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL

Americans traditionally long for a mythic depth of awareness which they helplessly call *experience*: the-way-it-really-happened, the-truth-of-the-matter, honest-to-god-experience, real-life. . . . By some peculiar historical breeding, the pragmatic, sensible, fact-to-fact flow of actuality has often been joined, for Americans, with salvational fervour, idealism and lyric exaltation.

The tough and professional ideological terms of European literary creeds, such as "realism" and "naturalism," have undergone odd sea-changes before being beached on the sentimental realism of a Sinclair Lewis or the mystic naturalism of a Theodore Dreiser. Or one might contrast the recurrent quasi-literature of American and continental versions of the excremental vision: the boozy love of Henry Miller as against the hopped-up hatred of Louis-Ferdinand Celine. Or, at a more serious literary level, compare the restrained and polished English "novel-of-manners"—even when currently "angry"—with the crudely heroic yet insistently Keatsian *The Great Gatsby*. Isn't some analogous quality to be found in Thoreau's poignant desire to live "life to the full" when actually pursuing ascetic and alienated contemplation of the essence of things? Or in Melville's fantastic desire to conjoin the harsh actuality of the maritime proletariat, the mammoth physical reality of cetology, and poetic ruminations on the ambiguous non-existence of the divine? The strange fusion of raw actuality and lyrical adoration would seem to have an insistent recurrence in American imaginative prose that can be matched in no other literature.

There is also the increasing degeneration of poetic naturalism in the *love-of-life-and-love* tradition, which is naturalistic in its materials and revelations of motives but naively and sententiously poetic in its methods and aims: from the awkward insights of Sherwood Anderson through the sentimental sights of William Saroyan and Thomas Wolfe

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to the lugubrious fogs of Jack Kerouac. But this immature line of ecstatic hyperbole is not the only effort to give the crude and simple transcendence. The alliance of naturalism's socially common, emotionally primitive and physically sordid and violent materials (minus the positivistic ideology of earlier naturalism) with modern lyric poetry's metaphoric and idiosyncratic language and complex rhetorical and symbolic organization (minus the formal order of traditional poetry) would appear to be characteristic of several diverse contemporary literary movements. It is not only a Faulkner, and the Southern Honeys who have nourished themselves off his rich hive of rhetoric and extremity, who torture the violently ordinary into prose-poetry. Stendhal and Dostoevsky and Gide presented unique heroes through an ostensibly transparent style of dialectical insight; Faulkner and his contemporaries hide ordinary (or sub-ordinary) heroes behind an apparently obscure style of overpowering actuality.

The increasing tendency to join lyrical rhetoric and naturalistic extremity can be seen as pervading an unexpectedly wide range of fictions. Under this impetus, even the *aesthetic* novelist concerns himself with larger, cruder, more sexually and socially representative reality. Even Vladimir Nabokov, the delightful manneristic *blagueur,* moves from the esoteric material of his earlier novels (*Bend Sinister, Camera Obscura, The Real Life Of Sebastian Knight*) to the voracious American teenager and highway-culture of *Lolita.* His fictional aim remains almost purely aesthetic—the incongruous image, the covertly expanding metaphor, the literary parody, and, most basically, theme and variations on the artist *manqué* and his impossible muse; but the naturalistic expansion of his materials to include statutory rape, motels, American sight-seeing and all the ugly-beautiful oddities of mass Americana has, evidently, confused more than one reader. On the other hand, the *social* novelist now also concerns himself with elaborate stylization, metaphoric language and artful literary symbols. Even Bernard Malamud, in the incisive social and psychological realism of *The Assistant,* parodies a line from Othello in a crucial scene ("Dog—uncircumcized dog!" says the simple Jewish girl as the ultimate response to the gentile bum who has just raped her). Despite some incongruity with his realistic manner, the author then develops the motif for his concluding grotesque metaphor of the castrated *goy.* Such artifice, and the ironic use of allusions to Dostoevsky and other literary matters, attempts to give a symbolic resonance to what nonetheless remains a neo-naturalistic genre-study of an exalted but emphatically ordinary Jewish family in the Depression who are victims of their socio-economic milieu.

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The poeticization is particularly striking in all those urban novelists whose essential sources and materials are in the realist-naturalist traditions. While it is hard to define the direction of a one-book novelist like Ralph Ellison, his *Invisible Man* (certainly the major work by a Negro writer in recent years) interestingly combines the vehement naturalism of protest literature, the self-conscious literary devices of surrealism, poetic allegory and a highly worked rhetoric. The occurrence of so many works with just these characteristics suggests a literary *Zeitgeist.*

While it once was a critical commonplace that *first* novels were characterized by heavy poetic rhetoric and symbolic tendentiousness, these qualities now frequently appear as part of the *mature* style towards which the novelist reaches. This change in mode in a serious urban novelist can be recognized by comparing the early and late work of Saul Bellow. His first novel, *Dangling Man,* was a wry dramatization of a *petit bourgeois* clerk and intellectual in the dry and transparent language of the social-realist tradition. The theme and organization of the work, as the title indicates, essentially derived from a concept of urban sociology: the marginal man. Bellow's second novel, *The Victim,* exploits typical urban scenes and types and the crude realities of anti-Semitism, but the prose style and narrative order of realism are now undershot with Kafkaesque allegorical ambiguities around the identity of victim and the victimizer. In his third and most ambitious novel, *The Adventures of Augie March,* Bellow has markedly dropped realistic narrative for a complicated variation on the picaresque; sociology has been submerged in symbolism; and the style has acquired a rotund elaborateness and an uncomfortable number of adjectives and metaphors. The basic materials—city poverty and ethnic social types, the young man on the make, the competitive ethos and petty larceny, sex mixed up with status, left-wing politics, etc.—are all essentially things brought into the novel by naturalism. Augie March, despite all the poetic and formal complication and irony, is but another version of Bellow's obsessive concern with the urban phenomena of the social-and-self-alienated marginal man. So, more fancifully, with *Henderson The Rain King.*

Bellow's movement into poeticization of an essentially social point of view covers about a decade. The more prolific, but less polished, Herbert Gold follows the same course in about half that time. In his rather flabby first two novels, *Birth of a Hero* and *The Prospect Before Us,* Gold attempted to give ponderous significance to emphatically ordinary figures—a suburban accountant and a self-made manager of a

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cheap hotel—in a flatly detailed prose. It is not until his much more interesting third novel, *The Man Who Was Not With It,* that his skid-row tempters are turned into symbolic devils and his physical and social detailing becomes a richly metaphoric style indebted both to the aphorisms of Heraclitus and Freud and the jargon of carnival barkers and hopheads.

As in Nelson Algren's *The Wild Life,* Gold's hero is a lower class youth who is given mythic proportions. While Gold is a less sentimental writer than Algren, there are some basic similarities in the exaltation of harsh reality and the education of a young man by way of crime, physical violence, wandering, sexual voyeurism, and in the lovingly elaborated purlieus of cheap pleasure. Gold's affirmation of gross experience has a more coherent pattern than Algren's and *The Man Who Was Not With It* consistently develops the maturation theme favored by so many of these novelists: the growing-up, and wising-up, of the passionate but inchoate rebel against family, society and self. Without examining in detail Gold's allegory—that it is allegory, everything from chapter epigraphs, symbolic names and metaphoric asides to frequently jagged over-writing, insists—we can note the rather surprising implications of the maturity the rebel is reaching for. While such heroes learn to eschew the carnival morality of the fast buck and the con-man's hard-sell to empty success, they also learn to despise the middle-class escalator (and the pretty but compulsive and ambitious, and therefore sexually counterfeit, middle-class girl). However, the heroes have no desire to change society nor, finally, to escape from it. They leave the road and go home again; they quit trying to kill their fathers and authority; they give up their larcenous artistry and their more imaginative longings and go along with the philistine rules and an ordinary job; and they tend to identify their own contradictions and failures with those of the society, and maturely settle down to living with both. These wise ironists masked as ordinary and representative heroes, see through, yet accept, ordinary life and society as it is; or, in Gold's "head-talk," they are simultaneously "with it" and "not with it."

What, then, has all the violence, sordidness, wildness, rebellion and extremity been about? It would simply appear that the harsh actuality is to be understood as the "really real" that underlies the ordinary appearances of common life. The poetry is there to insist upon the point. By rebellion, violence, and the purgation of disgust—the downward path to wisdom—the sensitive heroes become ordinary people accepting life and society as it is, only they are disenchanted in advance and therefore not capable of having vicious ambitions and illusions.

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While these statements apply primarily to *The Man Who Was Not With It,* I believe that this novel is more representative than not, and that there is an analogous dialectic in many of the poetic-naturalist fictions. A more tricky version of the same views can be found in that novel still much favored by sensitive undergraduates, Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye.* Here the sensitive adolescent, like most contemporary heroes, sees through all the "phonies" that run society and make the surface values. (He also insists on his own awareness—as do our authors—by a mannered colloquialism, obscenity and roughness which distinguishes his from the polished ways of the phonies.) But the sensitive hero also finds that his difference and rebellion lead to madness and sickness, which, all the modern sages assure him, is neither mature nor practical. Besides, things are so very complicated these days. . . . So the hero goes back to what he was doing (Salinger's hero is young enough so that his yearnings can be left muddied and his rebellion won't have any impractical consequences, though many of the problems posed to his awareness are beyond youth and such an easy lack of consequences—thus the basic double-play of precocity). That he is doing what everyone else is doing, however, is not to be seen as the ordinariness of the hero; he isn't really ordinary because of his memory and knowledge of extremity as a secret badge of his sensitive uniqueness. Or, as the whole child-cult of sensitivity suggests, none of the ordinary are really ordinary because naked awareness shows the ordinary as fantastically unique, though the un-naked pretend that it isn't so.

Thus it may be suggested that what has happened in much of the American novel is that the materials usually associated with literary naturalism, and even many of its values of social criticism, moral revulsion and rebellion, have become poetically subtilized and stylized. But one of the main tenets of naturalistic literature, that brute social forces determine individual destinies, has not really been modified by the complication of language, form and feeling. Nor is it essentially changed by ironic self-awareness. While there is certainly nothing wrong in alley cats becoming literary leopards, nor in a self-conscious artifice of language—after all, that is what literature is—the carnivorous actuality of the ordinary rather than the unique is the essential fact here. Sometimes the choice of poetic artifice, rather than the artifice of straightforward clarity, seems to be a device to obscure the basic naturalism which is now in critical disrepute. On the weird assumption that life, and therefore literature, is more complex—it is simply harder, which is not at all the same thing—there has developed an elaborate fictional hyperbole. Confronted with this metaphorization of the mundane, we

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almost forget that the ordinary is often not complex and extreme but just flatly ordinary.

The poeticization of fiction has undoubtedly been influenced by the modern poetic renaissance of the recent past and its learned and persuasive critics. It may also be a result of more general forces of cultural sophistication and of the ironic rhetorical complexity of certain humanistic (*not* naturalistic) European novelists. Is the elaborate stylization of what was once presented more simply and directly, organic? Perhaps style in many of these works is not, despite the novelist's desires, so much a reflection of personality as of intellectuality. And is sophisticated intelligence, and the loss of more primitive vitality, one of the causes of that peculiarly conservative dialectic that comes out of even the most rebellious and romantic of these novelists? But however much intelligence is self-consciously at work in contemporary poetic naturalism, the art still centers on that traditional American faith in which harsh actuality is given lyric exaltation as the most meaningful and ultimate knowledge. Perhaps, given the nihilistic force of the American scene, it cannot be otherwise.

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BOOKS

THE BATTLE OF LOWELL

LIFE STUDIES. By Robert Lowell. Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. $3.50.

When Robert Lowell's first book of poems appeared, about fifteen years ago, it seemed to me and most others that he was the heir of all the poetic ages, at least from Milton to Hart Crane. He could write with the abandon of Crane and yet make sense like Milton. He proved to have a real subject and a real place in the world at just about the moment when Auden, for one, seemed in danger of forfeiting his place and subject and becoming a globe-trotting commentator. Lowell's subject was of the largest; it had to do with history and the self. And although this was also the subject of some of his great elder poets, he had special reasons for laying claim to it too. Boston, city of historic battles and embattled selves, was his birthright as well as his birthplace; his family history was in some degree its history. And so the Boston of the old families, with its monuments, its Public Gardens, its favorite suburbs and resorts, its own Atlantic Ocean, became the main setting of his poems—his Lake Country, his Yoknapatawpha.

In his early lyrics and monologues Lowell went to work on this faded locale as Faulkner had done on his faded South. He took the city's latter-day unreality to himself, determined to restore to both of them an awareness of their common past, their common position in the universe, their common fall from grace. In his own mind he revived the vehemence of the old wars and controversies which had made Boston Boston. A Lowell and not a Lowell, an escaped Bostonian, a puritan turned Catholic, a Catholic whose puritanism made him continue to worry his new faith, he seemed to rejoice in his contradictions, including the pain of them. The hurtful exhilaration of the experience was written all over the style of his poetry. The muscular verbs, packed epithets, rushing enjambments, fierce play of wit, persistent interplay of heroic and mock-heroic modes, made for a bravura medium awesome in its magnificence and a little relentless in its intensity. In this verse Boston was brought alive, but as it might be on a Judgment Day presided over by some half-pitying, half-jeering divinity. An atmosphere of mad extremity and futility prevailed. Jesus walked the waters on

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Easter Day to ferry Grandfather Winslow to Acheron in a swan boat from the Public Gardens. A Concord farmer trying to kiss his wife saw himself growing scales like Eden's serpent. The Atlantic was fouled with dead sailors and itched to possess nuns and other virgins. A man dreamed, only dreamed, of writing the *Aeneid*.

In the apocalyptic climate of the last decade, Robert Lowell became the leading poet of his generation. He wrote as if poetry were still a major art and not merely a venerable pastime which ought to be perpetuated. But there were difficulties in his extreme position and style. Randall Jarrell, an intensely sympathetic critic, once summed them up by speaking of the contagion of violence, the excess of wilful effort, in Lowell's work. "As a poet Mr. Lowell sometimes doesn't trust enough in God and tries to do everything for himself." It may be that he didn't trust enough in nature and human life. His native place and chosen setting offered little that appealed to his senses and affections as intimately as, say, the southern Negroes and poor whites, with their work-worn hands, sun-seasoned shacks and other attributes, appealed to Faulkner. Nor did religion seem to be a substitute for the tempering effects of such immediacies, except as religion was embodied in character—the character, for example, of the proud Mother Superior in his fine monologue, "Mother Marie Therese." Here as in many other poems, like "The Drunken Fisherman" and "Falling Asleep Over the Aeneid," Lowell's wryly tragic imagination found its form. Elsewhere it tended to run riot even more than Faulkner's rather similar imagination has done.

A consciousness of these old difficulties seems to be implied in *Life Studies,* a volume made up of new poems together with a few older ones and an autobiographical fragment in prose. The new style is conspicuously barer than the old style, and the poet is more intent now on understanding the causes of his tragic imagination than on flaunting it. He seems no longer to seek support from theology. The opening poem, "Beyond the Alps," about a train journey from Rome to Paris, appears to record his apostasy; and there is further evidence in the absence of religious feeling and imagery in the poems themselves. A frankly de-converted poet is a rarity in these times; but the poetry here is not about the drama—if any—of de-conversion. It is about the aftermath. After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Guilt, remorse, feelings of loss? Not at all. With scarcely a backward glance at all that, Lowell addresses himself to his life studies like a painter or sculptor who wants to ground his art more firmly in the observation of things as they are in the natural world. But the title of the volume has, of course, only limited

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application. Nature for Lowell is his habitat, heritage and present existence; and his scrutiny of these things is anything but objective. More than his former religious commitments, they vex his memory and confine his ego. Two poems describe actual incarcerations: in a mental hospital where he was a patient, and in a jail where he served a term as a Conscientious Objector during the last war.

Indeed it is still a dark day in Boston even though it is no longer Judgment Day. Hardly anything is what it should be even though the discrepancies now produce more humor and quizzical tenderness than fierce wit. The book abounds in second-class Lowells, in mothers who were unequal to their pretentions when alive and to their black and gold coffins when dead; in fathers who, though naval officers, preferred automobiles to ships and whose "Sunday mornings were given to useful acts such as lettering three new galvanized garbage cans: R.T.S. LOWELL—U.S.N."; and in only sons who had chronic asthma, chronic truculence and got themselves expelled from the Public Gardens. Lowell's often merciless anatomy of his parents is matched by his merciless account of himself. The volume that began with "Beyond the Alps" ends with "Skunk Hour," in which he claims affinity with the noisome scavengers of the title.

The persistent refusal of happiness, the constant indulgence of a guilty conscience, would make a dreary spectacle if it were not for a certain knowing humor and a certain poise of style in the offender. But Lowell is not only the hunger artist practicing an art of famine because he doesn't like food; he knows he is something like that and makes a conscious role of it. The prose memoirs are the most triumphant example of his essential composure. The surface of them is all anecdote and caricature, malign and dazzling; but the interior is solid social analysis of a family, a society, a period; and when completed the work will probably excel any poet's autobiography since Yeats's. The portraits and memories in verse are excellent in their command of a cadenced as opposed to a metrical medium and they are exceedingly lively. But given their intense response to what they describe, they suffer a little from being inconclusive as to the meaning of it all. Where, Henry James would inquire, is your dénouement? Still, the poems add up to something like the effectiveness of *Mauberley,* Pound's sequence of scenes and portraits from London life. They represent, perhaps, major poetry pulling in its horns and putting on big spectacles and studying how to survive. The once militantly tragic poet, who warred bitterly on himself, is pictured on the jacket of *Life Studies* wearing big spectacles.

F. W. Dupee

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AN ACADEMY OF RISK

THE TRADITION OF THE NEW. By Harold Rosenberg. Horizon Press. $4.95.

"This man is dangerous." The old postoffice ads alerting the community to a malefactor at large, armed and with a record, are joyously brought to mind by the bold figure of Harold Rosenberg in his book of collected essays, *The Tradition of the New*. The man who invented the term action painting is an actionist critic. All his life, as these essays show, he has been interested only in action, in the "act," a favorite word with him, succinct as a pistol-shot. Before action painting, there was the action poem (the poem as destructive agent—Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Rilke, Valéry), and political action (Marxism). To Mr. Rosenberg, action and the imitation of an action—drama—are essentially the same. He is exhilarated by the hero in history, which means that he sees history as a stage of sublime or ridiculous gestures; the hero's historical "task," what used to be called the deed, is finding the appropriate gesture. This requires a willed transformation of the merely given self, as in the evolution of the dramatic character of the Bolshevik, a secular convert; in some instances, the "transformation" may be only a disguise for a bald spot, like a toupée, which turns the historical drama into comedy. In either case, Mr. Rosenberg, who has commandeered a loge seat for the performance by the authority of his intellect, genially applauds. He knows that the problem of action is serious, dead serious for our pistol-point time, and yet his very fascination with the problem makes him also a critical spectator, indeed an ideal connoisseur of the spectacle. His geniality, which has something of the pirate in it, is a product of detachment, a quality which, contrary to common belief, is often found in the true actionist in his moments of leisure—the balletomane commissar, the bandit-chief in the forest watching a Cossack sword-dance. The performer of deeds can be objective, just because he appreciates acting. Hamlet got the pun too, which runs like a mystification through language.

The great joy of this book is its zestful freedom, again the result of objectivity. The essays, written over the past twenty years, have been assembled in four sections, on painting, poetry, politics, and intellectual history, and are interrelated in a way that at first appears casual, until the light dawns and the reader becomes aware that he is following the greatest show on earth—the international human comedy of modern times, a mixture of genres, from tragedy to vaudeville, whose only heroes, finally, are artists. Thanks to his detachment, Mr. Rosenberg views the

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twentieth century as all of a piece: a century of the new, of invention, transformation, remaking, fresh gestures. In other words, Mr. Rosenberg's idea is that if you don't remake yourself in this century, somebody else will remake you—in a gas chamber. If modern history is a panoramic stage, it is also a scientific laboratory for the production of new human beings, new identities. The action painter who "gesticulates" on canvas so that he may see himself, as it were, in silhouette and discover who he is, is experimenting on himself just as Rimbaud did, and as the Communists did to manufacture, out of the "iron" process of logic, the figure of the Bolshevik, and the Nazis in their concentration-camp workshops, to make a new "scientific" humanity—as well, incidentally, as a new kind of lampshade. The purge indeed (Mr. Rosenberg does not happen to mention this, but he would surely agree) is the first obligatory step, whether it is the infantile castor-oil purge of Mussolini, the mass purges of the Soviet Union, the brainwashing of the Korean prisoners-of-war, the pseudo-purge of religious conversion, the prefrontal lobotomy, or the self-purgation of the artist. Mr. Rosenberg is not afraid of this amalgam, as it would have been called in the Thirties. When Anthony West declared in *The New Yorker* that the poems of Baudelaire led straight to the death-camps, he was asserting in an hysterical way a philistine and semi-totalitarian doctrine of "responsibility"; Mr. Rosenberg sees a connection between all these modern events that is neither causal nor criminal. His detachment permits him to observe a likeness-in-difference without feeling obliged to confess up and withdraw his support from Rimbaud, Baudelaire, or De Kooning.

Similarly, Mr. Rosenberg's eagle's eye view of the twentieth century has made him the first to discern tendencies and correspondences that became only slowly visible, if visible at all, to other critics. In an essay on the Fall of Paris, written in 1940, he rapidly sketches out the whole idea of Malraux's *Musée Imaginaire* (1949); it might be objected that Mr. Rosenberg did not "do" anything with his idea while Malraux made a book out of it, but a better way of putting it is that Malraux "got" a book out of it, i.e., labored it to yield him a return. Mr. Rosenberg was also the first to see through the guilty-liberal racket and the mass-culture racket: in a number of essays now grouped under the general heading, "The Herd of Independent Minds." This new body of parasitic literature—the *True Story* confessions of ex-Communists and ex-liberals and the mass-culture symposia—produced for kicks for a mass audience, is itself of course a sociological phenomenon, reflecting the vast growth of a class of professional intellectuals who are the tour-directors of modern society on a cruise looking for itself. The architects, designers, psychiatrists, museum men, questionnaire sociologists, "depth"

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sociologists, students of voting habits and population patterns, are all engaged in providing identities ("Tell me how you voted and I'll tell you who you are" or vice versa), showing their publics how they can yet be somebody through art-appreciation, music-appreciation, good-design-appreciation, self-appreciation, i.e., knowing Values. As Mr. Rosenberg says, "Today everybody is already a member of some intellectually worked-over group, that is, an audience."

Mr. Rosenberg himself is a permanent revolutionist in politics and the arts. Still, sitting in his loge seat in the intervals of partisanship, he enjoys the farce by which the New is converted into the Old, by being turned into a profit-commodity, as modern painting has been by fashion designers, educators, and wallpaper firms; this in fact is the Handwriting on the Wall. Art movements "sold" to the consumer are consumed in both senses. The position of the revolutionary critic is itself comically subject to erosion under these circumstances—a point Mr. Rosenberg has noted.

His sense of proportion and balance prevents him, almost everywhere ("Politics as Dancing" is the exception), from being mastered by one of his ideas so that he would fail to see its implications. This knowing what you are letting yourself in for constitutes audacity. Take action painting; while arguing strenuously for it, Mr. Rosenberg perceives where the hitch is. Action painting cannot lay claim to being judged esthetically; by being an act, an experiment, it deliberately renounces the esthetic as its category, for it cannot be recognized by the pleasure-faculty as objects of beauty are. If, indeed, by some accident —the passage of time or fading—such a painting became beautiful, it would cease to be an act, since the element of risk and hazard would depart from it, and it would come, as it were, to rest. In the same way, an act in history by becoming strikingly beautiful or noble slides out of the historical arena into a constructed frame—such actions, incidentally, are usually acts of sacrifice or heroic immolation. They become, precisely, a picture; a tableau or a statue. But if an action painting cannot be judged esthetically, how can it be judged? Not at all, cheerfully admits Mr. Rosenberg, though he qualifies this somewhat by saying that a genuine action painting can be told from a fake by the amount of struggle in it. This criterion, though, is highly arbitrary—how is the struggle to be measured and who is to be the judge? Mr. Rosenberg, then, is taking a risk, with his eyes open, of polemicizing for a kind of art of which no one can say whether it is beautiful or ugly or in between, but only that it is something, that it exists and represents a decision. This decisive coming into existence, in fact, is action painting's best plea for itself—a plea entered in history's court, which

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is where Mr. Rosenberg always argues. And it is true that the most convincing argument that can be made, really, for action painting (Mr. Rosenberg does not make it) is that Mr. Rosenberg himself, in his earlier essays on poetry, described exactly those qualities that action painting would later have. This suggests either that Mr. Rosenberg like a god invented action painting out of his own brain (and the movement certainly seems to have clarified from the date of his naming it) or that its appearance was inevitable in the history of art; that is, Mr. Rosenberg's prediction or hypothesis validates the painting, and the painting validates Mr. Rosenberg's hypothesis. This is perhaps untenable logically, but in practice such a coincidence really does hint that there is something to action painting.

In Mr. Rosenberg's opinion, this painting has assumed the binding authority of an historical necessity. We are forced to accept it as we accept other historical changes and advances. If we don't, we admit ourselves to the Academy, which (excuse me, Mr. Rosenberg) seems to me another version of the ashcan of history; if we don't accept it, in short, we are dead. Mr. Rosenberg is at once allured and repelled by the ever-present dead; the problem of burial is central to his book. Some of its finest passages touch on this theme, for example this, about Melville: ". . . while from the silent recesses of the office files, he drew forth the white-collared tomb deity, Bartleby." The spectral death-in-life of other contemporary critics, moreover, is made clammily apparent by contrast with Mr. Rosenberg's own vitality. His phrasing is a gleeful boyish exploit: "it would be just as well to bump the old mob off the raft"; ". . . to the tattoo artist on Melville's Pacific Island who covered the village headman with an overall design previously tried out on some bottom dog used as a sketch pad, the problem [of the audience] did not present itself." He is picturesque without forcing, like some veteran trapper or scout chatting on in the American lingo. The range of the voice is remarkable, and so is the control of volume. The accusation sometimes made against him, that he is abstract, is absolutely untrue of his writing, which moves from graphic image to graphic image (sometimes as in a really great comic strip) and is sensitive as a hearing-aid to sound. This plain talk nearly persuades you that he is right, not only in general, but in every particular of his reasoning, for what he presents is the picture of a man in a state of buoyant health. To resist his theories at any point it is necessary to draw back from this blast of vitality and ask, for instance, whether the theory of action painting is not just a new costuming of the old Marxist myth, in which the proletariat, having so long been acted on by history, decides to act into history and abolish it. By the violence of his "attack" on the canvas,

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the action painter abolishes art. But is it really possible to abolish art? Will not the esthetic as a category of human experience perversely assert itself, as history did in the Soviet Union by refusing to come to an end? This in fact is happening to the school of action painters and was bound to happen regardless of the activities of museum people and popularizers. Once you hang an act on your living room wall, a weird contradiction develops, which is inherent in the definition (or myth) of action painting itself; an "event" or gesture becomes, at worst, just as much an art-object as the piece of driftwood on the coffee-table or the seashell on the Victorian whatnot. At best, it becomes art. The truth is, you cannot hang an event on the wall, only a picture, which may be found to be beautiful or ugly, depending, alas, on your taste. This applies to a Cimabue "Crucifixion" just as much as to a Pollock or an African mask. You can decide of a new painting or a painting new to you that it is "interesting," but this only means that you are postponing, for the moment, the harder decision as to whether it is good or bad; a painting cannot stay "interesting," or if you keep on calling it that you have made "interesting" into an esthetic judgment—a judgment, by the way, which leads, by the broad path, to the populous cemetery of the Academy, where all but the immortal are buried by Father Time.

Mary McCarthy

KITSCH SOCIOLOGY

THE STATUS SEEKERS. By Vance Packard. David McKay. $4.50.

Vance Packard is to sociology what the *Saturday Review* no longer is to literary criticism. He uses as his raw material the products of academic research; borrows from its devices, methods and themes; waters them down and serves them up as sociological *Kitsch*. All the ingredients that go into artistic *Kitsch* are now being recombined in a newly emergent field of *Kitsch* sociology.

Packard has assiduously ransacked a great number of sociological studies, but in his rendering of their results all the shades of meaning disappear and the findings are falsified by being ripped out of context. The clean lines and delicate colors of the original are blurred and leveled in the spurious reproduction. A few of the elements in Packard's technique of *Kitsch* sociology are worth noting.

1) *False Knowingness*: Imply that you are in the academic know; hence, though you have no criteria by which to evaluate seriously a

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piece of research, suggest your knowledge by name-dropping and spurious identification: "political sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld of Columbia University says," "sociologist Milton Gordonn, now of Wellesley College," etc. When you lack standards of significance, you can at least borrow the prestige of institutional affiliation to enhance your air of authority.

2) *Homogenization of Facts*: If a sense of qualitative discrimination is lacking, the quantity of facts must make do. Hence the reader's resistance must be overwhelmed by bringing to bear on him an avalanche of ill-assorted and homogenized facts. In such a procedure the trivial becomes important and the important trivial: "In a study of a group of call girls, it was found that the pimp, far from being a harsh exploiter, typically functions as a status symbol," or "Children often find living with a rapidly upward-mobile couple a strain. They tend to feel isolated and insecure; and may compensate by becoming chronic talkers." This reads like an unwitting parody of the less happy products of modern sociology.

3) *Fake Precision*: Real knowledge can be simulated by giving precise, though really irrelevant, information: "I talked with a Venetian gondolier who obviously was very pleased with his $1,050 gondola."

4) *Stimulus and Reward*: Frighten the jaded reader, arouse his guilt and anxiety, but at the climax soothe and reassure him. Talk of "the hidden barriers that affect you, your community, your future," or "an upheaval in the American way of life," of "disquieting changes," assure him that "all in all, we are in the process of becoming a many-layered society. . . . If the frustration mounts . . . we may well get a movement for the nationalization of industry." But then, having raised these specters, suggest that there is nothing really wrong with American society that cannot be cured by a change in our attitudes; it's all in the mind: "I think we should all be happier, and live more stimulating lives, if . . . we judge people not by the symbols they display and the labels they wear but rather by their individual worth." And after you have aroused anxious concern about the display of status symbols, end by saying: "Status distinctions would appear to be inevitable in a society as complicated as ours. The problem is not to try to wipe them out—which would be impossible—but to achieve a reasonably happy society within their framework . . . much can be done to promote contentment, mutual respect, and life satisfaction."

Packard's formula is perhaps best exemplified by his technique of enumerating in a chapter the horror of a particular aspect of status-striving and then ending with a homily designed to endear the author to the apprehensive reader. The ladies can safely read about residential

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segregation and the quest for the "proper address," since at the end of the chapter they are enabled to reaffirm the traditional pieties: "The home, I should think, should properly be a private and very individual heaven. Progress would seem to lie in the direction of turning inward rather than outward for inspiration in the creation of one's homestead." It is safe to indulge in Packard's "sociology of sex appeal"—to learn, for example, that "upper-level males show considerably more fascination with the female's breasts, both as objects of beauty and as objects for manipulation during intimacies, than males from the lower classes. The latter tend to associate them more with the feeding function"—since Packard assures the reader at the end of the chapter that "relations between the sexes at all levels and in all areas have distinctive characteristics that deserve our sympathetic understanding."

Still, Packard's adroitness can hardly explain the success of the book. What then can account for it? I believe that the author has quite accurately gauged or sensed the drift of the *Zeitgeist*. Twenty years ago, when the Depression vividly demonstrated the realities of class power, the dynamic force in American intellectual and political life came from a desire to change or reform the social system. Today, during the bland Fifties, there is little concern with the facts of power; people are concerned instead with distinctions of status. Such concern, of course, is not new in American life, nor has it exactly passed unnoticed by earlier writers; only a *Kitsch* sociologist, crudely committed to the knife-edge present, could write as if Tocqueville and Veblen had never said anything about this matter. Nonetheless, the temporary disappearance of major and dramatic political issues and the affluent stability that at least some Americans enjoy, has led to an intensified preoccupation with status. In the Thirties the Lynd's monumental *Middletown* studies focused on the drama of exploitation and the inequalities of class; in the Fifties we experience a "honeymoon between the classes," to use Kenneth Burke's apt phrase, and we read *The Lonely Crowd.* Anxieties now center upon the visible appurtenances of status and the precarious hold we have on our status identities. It is these anxieties which Packard shrewdly exploits. His *Kitsch* sociology, far from being informed by a scholar's concern or a reformer's zeal, is anchored in nothing more substantial than a guilty nostalgia for a supposedly less status-conscious and hence less anxiety-ridden past.

The more secure the status of individuals the less need they have to talk about it, and the less likely they are to emphasize consciously the preservation of status barriers. There are no restrictions to the admission of Jews to the leading social clubs in Britain, but in America

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such restrictions are the rule. (Yet the recent fascination of the British public with the distinctions of U and Non-U speech and manners leads one to surmise that in Britain, too, status lines have become blurred.) Concern with status and background clearly reflects uncertainty about social position, hence it is the *nouveaux riche* and the new middle classes rather than the old upper classes who must, to allay their doubts, display symbols of status and reject the strivings of the newest wave of "upward mobiles." Bryce remarked long ago that "the existence of a system of artificial rank enables a stamp to be given to base metal in Europe which cannot be given" in America.

Nevertheless, concern for status is hardly a specifically American characteristic, nor is it specific to the contemporary scene. Theodore Dreiser and Edith Wharton knew more about it than Mr. Packard will ever know; and when Edmund Burke wrote about the "nabobs," adventurers who had grown rich in India and suddenly found themselves sympathetic to the Jacobin cause because, "they cannot bear to find that their present importance does not bear a proportion to their wealth," one is forcibly reminded of certain Texas oil millionaires who supported McCarthy for quite similar reasons.

Though *Kitsch* sociology by its nature lacks genuine perceptiveness, Packard has a fairly good journalistic eye for much that is happening on the contemporary scene. He is shrewd enough, for example, to discern that though there is still considerable social mobility in America, a great part of such mobility simply involves small movements back and forth between the manual and lower white collar occupations, so that analytic focus on such inconsequential movements in the status pyramid obscures growing rigidities in more significant areas. Some of the descriptions of the strategy of snobbishness, of the nightmare world of subtopia and of the gambits of the status game as played in corporate bureaucracies and on private golf clubs, are well done. There are some interesting observations of class barriers in education. But all such post-radical criticism is finally innocuous, for it is designed to afford its audience the pleasure of deploring a state of affairs which it secretly craves. It enables the reader to be simultaneously in and out. *Kitsch* sociology flatters its public; it allows the reader to compensate for his guilt in condoning a meretricious reality by the fake catharsis of verbal condemnation. And this very condemnation is, in turn, designed to reconcile him to his role as a part of that reality.

Lewis Coser

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A METROPOLITAN GIRLHOOD

MEMOIRS OF A DUTIFUL DAUGHTER. By Simone de Beauvoir. Translated by James Kirkup. World Publishing Company. $5.

Mlle. de Beauvoir is writing one of the recognized types of autobiography—the case-book story of a development. This kind of reminiscence, unlike the hold-all volume of memoirs, needs to be written very austerely. Nothing must go in that does not directly bear on the theme, and there can only be one theme: the growth of the writer's inner mind. This, in fact, is almost the only kind of writing in which it is an offence to bring in material for no better reason than that it is likely to interest the reader. No episode, however picturesque, no meeting, with however famous a personage, no adventure, however heroic, has a place in the book unless it can be shown to have been formative. And, as we all know, the formative things in our lives are never the ones that make the best material. The decisive things in everyone's childhood and adolescence are always much the same, and it is never possible to make them interesting to anyone else. Wordsworth, being a great poet, manages to interest us in an account of how he rowed onto a lake in an unlawfully borrowed boat, had a fit of the shudders when he thought a mountain peak was looking at him accusingly, and hastily rowed back to shore. Everyone's childhood contains such incidents, but not everyone can relate them in such a way that his hearers retain consciousness. Still, the risk of being a bore is one that must be taken, or this kind of autobiography cannot be written. The unspoken challenge to the reader must be, "If you want to know about *me,* read this: if not, leave it alone."

The frequent boredom I felt, therefore, at the triviality of most of Mlle. de Beauvoir's narrative cannot be brought forward as a legitimate critical charge against the book. Little Simone grew up in one of those shut-in, asphyxiating French interiors that have been described so many times. It was the characteristic large French family whose members keep in constant touch with one another, making rounds of visits, never overlooking a birthday or festival, and staying in one another's country and town houses. Simone's parents were at first solidly established, with good prospects; but, after the war, "bad times" descended, social ambitions were abandoned, and the two daughters were set to learn secure trades. Simone's cleverness at her books, which originally delighted her father, suddenly made her distasteful to him. The reason, in retrospect, is plain enough; as long as the family fortunes were sound

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enough for her father to envisage a smart marriage for her, the bookishness was an additional charm, making her well-informed, a fit mate for an important man. Once that dream crumbled, the same studious bent was simply a matter of dowdy examination-passing; furthermore, like all Frenchmen, M. de Beauvoir detested Civil Servants, and here was his own daughter turning into one; "At any rate, you'll have a pension," he used to growl at her, as if already envying the money she was going to cost him as a taxpayer. Meanwhile her mother raised streaming eyes to heaven because the adolescent girl had lost her religious faith. It was the perfect upbringing for a novelist, but—like most upbringings—very unpleasant at the time.

And, of course, it was hugely, unrelentingly, *ordinary*. Through hundreds of pages we follow Mlle. de Beauvoir through her school lessons, her home life, her games with her sister and their dolls, her changing attitude towards her parents. There were holidays in the country, so different from Paris; there was the return to Paris, so different from the country; there was the clever and precocious schoolfellow on whom little Simone had a crush; there was the brilliant and public-spirited philosophy lecturer on whom slightly bigger Simone had a crush; there was the engaging male cousin with whom almost completely big Simone fell in and out of love. It was exactly the life of every middle-class girl since the middle-class world began. Then again, having no means of escaping from the dailiness of her life except through books, Simone, at all stages, read far too many of them and so fell victim to the spiritually toxic condition that excessive reading produces in the adolescent; this is faithfully described. She went for walks along the quais at night, and wept, and sobbed out lines of poetry to herself. She formed judgments on her fellow students. She wrote dialogues between the two halves of her being, and journals, and word-portraits of herself, and novels. In other words, she was the exactly typical bookish adolescent girl.

There are, I think, two motives for reading such a book. One, as I have suggested, is its universality. It is valuable to be forced to recognize the essential sameness of human life even under diverse circumstances, and even as lived by very exceptional people like Mlle. de Beauvoir. The other is that it provokes reflections about France, and what it is like for a writer to grow up there.

France, in spite of all the horrible things that have been done to her, has remained a great literary country for century after century. Why is this? Without wasting time pursuing the *ignis fatuus* of national temperament, I can think of two reasons straight away, and they are

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both strikingly documented in Mlle. de Beauvoir's book. One is that the literary and intellectual life of the nation takes place in the capital. London and New York are publishing centers, but beyond that they are simply collections of shops and offices; it is hard to imagine the life of the mind being lived in either place; they exist for business and social purposes. As regards the comparison with England, the crucial decision on the English side was to split the national university into two and remove both halves from the capital; this fits in with the stubborn English belief that the countryside is the only place for a self-respecting man to live in, and also flatters the traditional "balance-of-power" theory (the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford would be too important if there wasn't a Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge). This condemned the University of London to mediocrity, especially after Oxford and Cambridge decided to admit people who couldn't bring themselves to sign the Thirty Nine Articles; before that, London did at least get a trickle of brilliant sectarians like Bagehot; afterwards, it had to get along with throw-outs plus an increasingly large absentee student body composed of Africans, Indians, etc. None of this makes a Sorbonne; the firm pyramid of French education, which has enough prestige in the eyes of the population at large to be able to enforce a hard syllabus, owes its compact strength to the fact that the national university is *there,* in the midst of the cafés and theaters.

This by itself would not be enough, however; it draws essential support from the other thing that emerges so clearly from this book. France still has a bourgeoisie. The middle class may have given way everywhere else, but in France it stands firm. In the English-speaking world, the position of the bourgeois has been so undermined that there is nothing left solid enough to kick against; even in Belgravia, pony-tailed daughters take no more than fifteen minutes to talk Daddy into letting Harold paint a surrealistic mural over the fireplace; in America, staid professors lecture on Beatnik art. But in France the line is held. The family interior is stuffy, girls are still given a straight choice between strict virginity on the one hand, and on the other going to the bad and never being heard of again. French adaptation to the twentieth century has always been interestingly patchy; in 1909 Blériot flew the Channel as a demonstration of his country's willingness to embrace the new epoch of technology and precision engineering; but little Simone de Beauvoir, aged one year, was not allowed a glimpse of that epoch.

Not, that is, until she had passed her *bachot* and emerged into the free life of the university student: "free" along lines clearly marked out by tradition. Here were the brilliant minds at last, the new ideas,

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the avant-garde films, the Little Magazines. Nothing in Anglo-American life can possibly approach the sense of liberation that came with the sudden breaking apart of the chrysalis. And it was a necessary part of the tension that the two existed side by side. Simone was still living at home, still returning each night to that curtained, mothball-smelling domesticity. The lives nearest to her were in many cases more cruelly stifled than her own had been; her best friend, Zaza, was trapped in such an impossible conflict of emotions by the demands of family loyalty and religious devotion that—as the book touchingly describes—she actually wilted and died.

Against this backcloth, the clever and original people with whom Mlle. de Beauvoir finally came into contact seemed more than just clever and original. They positively flared against the rusty black of the curtain behind them. Because of it, they were provided with a generous area to work in. They wasted no time balancing the life of the university against the intellectual life in general. All art, all thought, all scholarship, flowed together in a glorious sense of release from the stuffiness that opposed them. Here, if we want it, is the explanation of why France can produce figures like Cocteau, who bob up without explanatory self-consciousness in half-a-dozen different arts; why Sartre can be thought no less a philosopher for having written plays; why French civilization has that solidity which saves writers and artists from pouring away their energy in explaining what they are up to. Whatever quarrels may break out between individuals, everyone is playing by the same rules. The types Mlle. de Beauvoir admired were exactly those who would be fostered by such a world. Herbaud, for instance:

> He spoke to me about his wife, who in his view was every feminine paradox incarnate; about Rome, which they had visited on their honeymoon, and the Forum, which had moved him to tears; about his system of ethics and the book he wanted to write. He used to bring me magazines like *Detective* and *The Autocar*; he would take a passionate interest in a bicycle race or in a detective story; he made my head swim with his anecdotes, with unexpected juxtapositions. He could handle everything—bombast and dry wit, lyricism and cynicism, naiveté and insolence—with such happy ease that nothing he said ever seemed banal.

In such a description we recognize the typical French man of ideas. Against him, in a natural balance, stands his *alter ego,* that other great typical French figure, the bourgeois father. M. de Beauvoir "thought all teachers were ill-bred pedants"; worse, they "belonged to the dangerous sect that had stood in defence of Dreyfus: the intellectuals. Blinded by their book learning, taking a stubborn pride in abstract knowledge

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and in their futile aspirations to universalism, they were sacrificing the concrete realities of race, country, class, family and nationality to those crackpot notions that would be the death of France and of civilization: the Rights of Man, pacifism, internationalism, and socialism."

I had long suspected that the utter deadliness of French small town and family life acted as a secret source of energy and inspiration, and this book provides solid documentation for that belief. For what, after all, would it have profited Mlle. de Beauvoir to grow up in a society where the young were offered bribes to read books, coaxed towards enlightenment like so many young Popeyes towards spinach? The portrait of Sartre, in the closing pages of the book, is alive with admiration and surprise: that such a person could exist, so serious and so liberated from petty concerns! But without that twenty-year hammering about "the concrete realities of race, country, class, family and nationality," there would have been no shadow for this light to shine into. Is there a young Simone de Beauvoir in London or New York? And if so, where is her Sartre?

John Wain

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LOGICIANS AND SPECULATORS

RELIGION, POLITICS, AND THE HIGHER LEARNING. By Morton White. Harvard University Press. $3.50.

In each of the ten essays which are here put together to form a book, Professor Morton White was originally commenting on contemporary philosophy before an audience of intelligent laymen: the laymen were sometimes listeners to the Third Program of the British Broadcasting Corporation, sometimes readers of such periodicals as *Confluence* and *Perspectives*. He is concerned with the public relations of philosophy rather than with philosophy itself. Have the analytical philosophers of the present time withdrawn too far into a corner, away from the public forum of debate around social and moral issues? Have they been too intent upon scientific method and too little intent upon religion, education, law and esthetics? Why have they surrendered so much of the wide territory of general discussion that was claimed as their own by John Stuart Mill and John Dewey? Morton White is not in the least disposed to apologize for, or to decry, the varied methods and achievements of analytical philosophers in America and in Britain in the last thirty years. On the contrary, he takes these patient philosophers to be the true exponents of rationality outside the sciences, and he is himself to be counted as one of them. Rather he wishes them to be less modest and unassuming, and to advance nearer to the center of public attention. By their own choice they have left an empty space, unoccupied and undefended, in the thought of their own time, and this space is being filled by cloudy prophets, who are quite unashamed of self-contradiction and obscurity and who are certainly not indifferent to public attention. He shows very clearly what may happen when rational control is relaxed in his essay "Original Sin, Natural Law and Politics," originally published in this review. This study of "atheists for Niebuhr" is both amusing and frightening, and it certainly illustrates his warning.

I think that there can be little doubt that he is right in his sociological remarks. There is in fact an urgent and still growing demand, both in America and Britain, for philosophical guidance about the foundations of law, of social policy and political consent, and of the principles of criticism in the arts. The market exists and will certainly be supplied from one source or another. In England the new democracy of speculation is in part the result of the expansion of universities and of the training of more teachers and technicians, and it is already re-

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subject matter; it is always the testing of some hypothesis which concentrates in a simple formula a wide range of observations.

Any philosopher who accepts all three propositions is thereby bound to disappoint the public looking for guidance about the principles of esthetic criticism or the nature of law and of history. He disappoints them because he will never presume to tell the public *why* they *must* adapt their methods of inquiry to their subject-matter in certain specific ways. There will be no *a priori* deduction of the necessary peculiarities of esthetic criticism, of law or of historical method. That men respond to art in certain specific ways, or that their legal systems assume certain forms, or that their understanding of their own past stresses some features of social life rather than others—these will be left as contingent matters of fact. The necessary connections between different powers of mind are to be left unexplained. We must not even presume that there are any necessary connections. This repudiation of any systematic philosophy of mind is essential to modern empiricism, to that philosophy which now flourishes at Harvard and in most British universities: for this philosophy orginated as reaction against the *a priori* psychology of Kant and Hegel and Husserl. Its first requirement was that psychology should be left to the psychologists, and that philosophers should once and for all cease to pose as super-scientists of the mind, as they have ceased to be super-scientists of matter. It would be ridiculous to suppose or to hope that this revolution in thought will ever be reversed. It is a kind of Luddite heresy, the heresy of those who try to destroy the new machines, to suppose that the discoveries of the last thirty years can ever be forgotten or ignored. At the same time one ought surely to count the loss. The loss is that the idea of philosophy as explanation of the forms of thought, and not simply as neutral description of them, disappears. Therefore the idea of philosophy as giving *guidance* to literary critics, to theorists of law, and to historians, also disappears. Philosophers become intellectual policemen, who direct the traffic and prevent collisions; they cannot tell the critics, lawyers or historians where they should be going. This is the ground of the public's dissatisfaction, and of the occasional turning back to the empty remains of Hegelianism in Jaspers and Heidegger. There will always be those who wish to persuade themselves that the old arbitrary play with philosophical abstractions still has some direct relevance to understanding the issues of desegregation and of social justice. So two uncommunicating worlds came into existence: the journalistic philosophy of the popular thinker, whose cheerful eclecticism is taken for originality, and the strict and enclosed philosophy of the academic journals. Morton White is here an admir-

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spected by those who plan radio and television programs and by publishers. Academic philosophers are lured from their recesses and persuaded to display their peculiarly careful habits of thought publicly. So far the effect has been that philosophy is associated with clever argument, with exact verbal distinctions and neat definitions. Philosophers have earned respect as the learned lawyers of abstract discussion, as experts in the logical arrangement of ideas, whom it is always wise to consult on the proper presentation of a case. They are also often seen as sophists of a superior kind, properly kept in universities for training the young in clear thought. But Morton White is, I think, requiring more of analytical philosophers than this neutral, corrective cleverness, which is a very small part of philosophy's main tradition. He believes that they can, if they will, bring some positive enlightenment about the true nature of law, of aesthetic enjoyment, and historical causation. They are more than expert witnesses in the logical presentation of a case: they have a case of their own. This is the claim that has been disputed by some contemporary philosophers themselves and is now disputed even by the general public. The issue is one of philosophy and not of sociology. Let it be admitted that there is a public which clamors for secular prophets, for grand philosophical designs in which art and morality and social policy are each put in their place within a magnificent whole. Let it be admitted that part of this public will turn to Miss Hannah Arendt, and to other uninhibited speculators, if they cannot find satisfaction in the empiricist philosophies now prevailing in universities. Is it accidental or essential in analytical philosophy that it should provide no such satisfaction? If it is essential, is this a defect in the philosophy itself? Or is it rather a virtue, a symptom of maturity? The answer is not obvious.

An analytical philosopher of the present day might accept all of the following propositions: (1) Every established human inquiry has its own canons of relevance and methods of argument. A philosopher can only make the logic of an inquiry more explicit and compare one method of argument with another. He has no superior and independent basis of criticism of his own. He can only draw attention to confusions of purpose and method. (2) Any attempt to divide the different types of inquiry from each other systematically must fail: for we can have no *a priori* insight into the limits of human knowledge, and therefore into the proper forms of its expression. (3) There is no essential difference between the methods appropriate to the study of human activities and those appropriate to the study of natural objects. Rational method in the pursuit of truth, outside mathematics, is the same whatever the

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able ambassador from the academic world in the country of the journalists; but he is weakened by irresolution at home. Is there any reason why philosophies of mind, attempts at some systematic classification of human powers and interests, should not still be the center of philosophy, as they have always been in the past? I cannot myself see any good reason, provided that every system of classification is now recognized to be tentative and provisional, as one of many possibilities. There are two strands in contemporary philosophy which can be held apart: the first denies that any unconditional necessity can be claimed for any conceptual scheme, since all conceptual schemes are liable to revision as positive knowledge increases. This is a principle to which Morton White returns again and again in the essays, and I do not dispute it. The second is the claim that philosophy should now properly be an *a priori* study of the forms of language, and never again an *a priori* study of the distinct powers of the human mind. This seems to me a confusion, almost a contradiction. The forms of speech have to be understood in their full context, as parts of "a form of life," as Wittgenstein remarked, and as social institutions. A proposition of a certain form can be identified as a moral or as an esthetic judgment, and the

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two categories can be clearly distinguished, only if some systematic classification of human activities is provided to give sense to the distinction. The philosophical psychology cannot finally be avoided.

I have some doubt about Morton White's essays, taken as a whole, because he nowhere seems to acknowledge the inadequacy, for his declared purposes, of mere logical analysis. I do not believe that he can revive the philosophical discussion of esthetics or of historical knowledge without being led through the forms of language towards some more general phenomenology of mind, however tentative and provisional and un-Kantian it may be. But one must wait to see. Meanwhile we have these civilized, undiscouraged, and responsible essays as some preliminary defense against the counter-attack of the old and unreformed German metaphysics—a counter-attack that is apparently stronger in America than in Britain, where the mood is one of waiting for something new to be suggested, but with a steady assurance that the new impetus in philosophy will not come from that direction.

Stuart Hampshire

AN HYPOTHETICAL TALE

THE EMPIRE CITY. By Paul Goodman. The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc. $6.95.

"I love you—it's nothing personal."

The Empire City, three of whose four parts were published as separate fictions in the past twenty years, is an abstract autobiography. In it events that happened to the author and his friends in New York City during the Depression, the War and the Postwar Years have been converted into parables of their successive ideas and cults. Goodman's narrative could have been subtitled, "The Memoirs Of An Ideologist." Except that, unlike naive conceptualists and joiners, with their faith in systems and their disillusionments, Goodman takes on ideas in order to get rid of them. By the end of *The Empire City* he has almost succeeded. Thus his fable has, finally, the quality of a true novel, in that through the events a development of character has taken place and an outcome has been reached: the catharsis of concepts.

In this "education" in reverse, the characters learn (or unlearn) by teaching. In every episode they scent a lesson to be passed on to others. Conversations consist of revelations or at least hints; occasionally, summaries of the points are drawn up; when necessary a mass meeting

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is held. At times the author cannot help but step out of character and add his bit; who can blame him?—if he held on to his notion it might impede his development. While other intellectuals like to talk about "putting things into question," with Goodman questions *and answers* keep turning into each other to form a kind of biological increment.

The Empire City is a teaching of our times in New York City—a tremendous project. Especially if one begins not with the etiquette of a social class or under the enchantment of social ambition or snobbery but as a sidewalk primitive, a Gidean orphan, with an animal's shrewdness and all learning to pick from. "What he really wants is to use the City as a school. Back to Socrates." Not a school for the paltry picturesque, street-scene violence or newcomers' *schmalz,* but for the large idea of man and nature. For to Goodman, the metropolis is the city-dweller's "nature"; the rocky skin and bones of the Empire City belong to Mother Earth herself, the same female he sees stretched out in her original voluptuousness in the sunset up the Hudson. She is to be studied by touching, and the re-learning of her body by the city man is Goodman's *scienza nuova.*

Horatio Alger, protagonist of *The Empire City,* starts his education by quitting school. His street-corner curriculum corresponds to the ruses of reality. "He knew the physics of the bounds and rebounds of the Spaulding High-Bouncer from a wooden wall and a cement floor. He knew the chemistry of substitute and preserved foods, which could be read directly on the labels by Federal law. He knew the biology of washrooms. . . . In linguistics he knew how to pretend that he came from Brooklyn or the Bronx." These things are only learned in being told—until he started to explain, "he [Horatio] never realized what a lot he knew." It is upon the communication of such knowledge that a city culture must be built. To me, the first merit of Goodman is his totally unself-conscious acceptance of the facts of our time and place, any of them—a machine standing in an empty lot, a Jewish boys' camp—as ranking with those of all times and places as objects of intellectual and esthetic interest. He has rejected patriotism to become the citizen of his moment.

Horatio's instruction opens in the Depression, when everyone was the ward of Eliphaz, the capitalist, who "wanted to change all use value into exchange value." *The Grand Piano,* book of the paupers' luxury, is followed by *The State Of Nature,* in which Eliphaz becomes a memory and his dependents are "weeded in" to the War either as soldiers or as pacifists. The setting loose of the beasts gives way to the postwar blues of *The Dead Of Spring,* which interprets the poisoned atmosphere of New York in those days as an emanation of the forgotten corpses of

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the War. Finally comes *The Holy Terror,* the present "sociolatry" in which success cannot be escaped even by the radical critic—"I felt I had something to contribute and I got up to speak. To my amazement I was met by a round of unanimous applause, instead of the scattering I had hitherto always encountered." In this period Horatio attends PTA meetings.

Of the four books, the best is Number Three, *The Dead Of Spring,* perhaps because the intangible processes of ideological liquidation characteristic of the postwar years responded best to Goodman's idea-burying passion; here, longer, more narrative chapters draw the reader in, while the rhetoric broods instead of buttonholing—the anguished passage on "dark fire" has the eloquence of a Shakespearean clown.

The teacher does not merely show—he shows as an example. The exemplary tale turns towards allegory, provided the master is convinced he knows the answer. Goodman has no answer, though he is loaded with answers. Like a good student of Aristotle and medieval logic, he conceives life as a problem; like a proper child of this century, he sees all solutions stamped with the Indian sign of inevitable failure. *The Empire City* has the look of allegory, with the non-natural ways of its happenings and its cast of personifications: Horatio, the sharp-eyed street urchin; Mr. Moneybags Eliphaz; Mynheer Duyck Duyvendak, rationalistic Father Knickerbocker; Lothair, the romantic radical. But New York is the city neither of God nor of Karl Marx; and having recited his parable our sage must invent another tale of foxes and grapes with which to take it back. Here, Goodman knows, you can't even depend on it that things will be lousy.

The Empire City is not an allegory but a fabulous adventure amid the commonplace, thus a true descendent of the Horatio Alger tales. Like the psychiatrist and social scientist, Goodman makes everything—the way people sit at lunch counters, why one takes the trouble to make a million—the business of his speculations, and a drama out of speculating his way out of his speculations. A recent trip to Ireland becomes a chapter in Book Four on the depopulation of the green island in which St. Patrick repents having driven out "the rigid reptile with warm blood."

To risk the cold cash of experience for the profits of theory does not, of course, always pay off. Parts of *The Empire City* are definitely under water; yet even in these wastes appear the markers of Goodman's lobster pots. "She looked grander than life size, like a queen of Memphis. When she kneeled with her child, playing with toys, they seemed to be two giants, a greater and a smaller, and the toys no toys at all but our towns. Our ranch houses and cars and cannon were the size of

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toys, but the mother and child were flesh and blood larger than a cathedral."

Goodman knows what is hidden from other ideologists: that the secret of the ideological age is a hunger for miracles. Mass belief and action aim at evocation—as Sartre has pointed out, a Communist demonstration, though it be devoid of practical results, has the function of a testamentary ritual. To Goodman every doing is a sacrament or ought to be. What does not change in him over the years is his belief that man ought to pour out his energies as an oblation to the opening of the heavens.

The most accessible miracle, the old reliable, is sex, but there are others. Sex in *The Empire City* is therapeutic, sociological, political, philanthropic—in a word, the sex of sex-reform, of "outspokenness" and "healthy relations," as much as of the wonder of creation. Horatio is Eros, Eros is a therapist and the therapist is Paul Goodman. As impulse and reflection "become one feeling of faith" in the gift to be received, art and thinking become ways of praying for it, that is, ways of evoking and seducing, which are the same thing. In Goodman's esthetic, writing a novel is an exercise in calling up intentional dreams that will act as a love charm to the world, with a second, intimate spell for the close ones.

As a priest of enthusiasms Goodman centers his teaching on what follows from attempts to work natural magic in public. On the streets of the Empire City a visible sacrament may bring down shame or even trouble with the police. Perhaps this is as it should be, but Goodman has a classicist's revulsion to hotel rooms. Let the whole city become a sacred grove, "and over it all an exulting community spirit." Only the public presence can make the magic real.

The celebrant thus turns into an ideologist of the reconstituted community; and though it is very likely that "a community occasion is under God's providence," this is the stress in Goodman that I find more embarrassing than anything "dirty." Other Utopians keep their generalized ecstasies for the end, when the phalansteries are set up and in working order; Goodman menaces privacy in every word.

Happily, however, we can be confident that the menace will remain a private one. For ideologist that he is, Goodman is never a mere agitator. He does not wish to organize a force for his desire, having so deep a belief in desire as a force. By weighing in practice how far this belief is to be trusted, the celebrant passes through the ideologist into the sage. Goodman's description of Eliphaz's mind is evidence of his adeptness in dual thinking that is the opposite of fanaticism:

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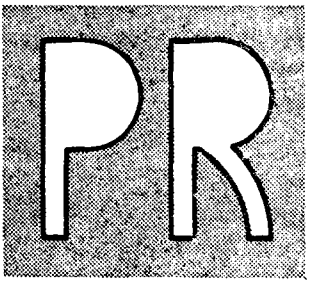

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As a wise man, he had the same thoughts by impulse as by reflection, in the dead of night as by daylight. The difference was that by impulse and at night he thrilled with delight at the prospect of an abyss; by day and on reflection he was prudent. It is as these feelings gradually become one feeling of faith that a wise man grows into a sage.

With its "acting out" amid frustrations of the wonderful fulfillment of desire, Goodman's fable of ideologies is also an epic of infantilism, including in this term its New Testament meaning as a synonym for resurrection. Children and animals snuggle against the tireless debaters of this "romance of spontaneous joy, freedom and fraternity"—I am reminded of a photo in The Lion House in Salt Lake City of Brigham Young, a comparable miracle maker, lost in a mob of his offspring and wives. *The Empire City* is written in the perspective of nature's newcomers, who take nothing for granted and to whom the race of adults is simply a breed of larger animals that behave like lunatics. The chapter, "On The Shore" in Book Three, in which a baby girl plays in the surf, is the high point of writing in the work; its low is Horatio's comic-book argot—"ourn," "gee you're green," "'cause"—as the boy philosopher of Book One.

Dramatically speaking, the sage is a bore. Whether as scout leader or sanctified messenger from Moscow, Rome or the Dark Mothers, he can draw lessons from events only at the risk of emptying them of interest. Most novelists try to reduce this risk through devices for "letting the facts speak for themselves"; Goodman multiplies it by making every character into a sage. Above his metropolis hovers the Buddha, Christ, Zarathustra, in a ring of disciples. As a basic image, this is not very agreeable: it leads to phrases like "they drew back from him . . . his eyes flooded with tears and he got up and went." The knower, with his Reichean pantomime of suffering, fury, defiance, supplies the reverse of conscious farce in *The Empire City*.

The novelist is a different kind of writer from the fabulist—his talent includes listening to his audience while it listens to him, and yielding to it for the sake of the story. The novelist is the most compliant among the artists; no meaning in his tale stands higher for him than its power to catch him hearers. Goodman is eager to be listened to too, but on his own terms, not at any cost. It is not from the novelists that he has derived the measure of his ingratiation. His affinities are with philosophers and poets, particularly the seekers of the absolute and of intoxication: Rilke, Kafka, Cocteau, Mallarmé.

The Empire City is not a good novel but it is a great book, as one might say of Melville's *Mardi* that it is a great book though by no means always a pleasure. Goodman has the humor, high and low, of a

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never-failing contradictory intelligence, plus the exuberance of one who has been visited by the animal faith, with which Horatio's education is concluded, that there are weapons "that do not weigh one down" and that the lover of life has also on his side "the force that is in the heart of matter, that, as if stubbornly, makes things exist rather than be mere dreams or wishes."

Harold Rosenberg

CAMUS AS DRAMATIST

CALIGULA AND THREE OTHER PLAYS. By Albert Camus. Alfred A. Knopf. $5.00.

So honest a man as Camus is obviously at a disadvantage in so dishonest an institution as the theater. His sincerity has become a legend, but it has prevented him from becoming a successful dramatist. The Nobel Committee commended his "clear-sighted earnestness," and Harold Clurman called him "a moment in the conscience of mankind." Obviously, this is not a man who can easily lend himself to the subterfuges of the stage, who can say of his playwriting, as Henry James did: "Oh, how it must not be too good and how very bad it must be!" I can not think of a better application of the term "defect of his virtue"; Camus's strenuous virtue is the key to his plays and to his defective sense of the theater. Explicitly forswearing "psychology, ingenious plot-devices, and spicy situations," he requires that we take him in the full intensity of his earnestness or not at all.

Simple in plot, direct in argument, oratorically eloquent, his dramas are like few other modern plays. They remind us of Gide and of the early Sartre (in *No Exit* and *The Flies*), before Sartre mastered the deceptions of politics and of the stage. But even these comparisons are inadequate because Camus differs significantly from his many French contemporaries who have put ancient myths on the modern stage. The others have turned conventional myths—at least their antiquity has made them seem conventional—into instruments of iconoclasm. Obviously stimulated by French neo-classical drama, Cocteau, Giraudoux, and Sartre became the debunking inside-dopesters of ancient mythology; they made Oedipus into a young man on the make, Electra into a rather addled termagant, Zeus into a tyrant. They overturned or exposed the classical stories. But what Camus does is to begin with a sufficiently cynical legend—the history of Caligula or the murder of the prodigal son (the basis of Robert Penn Warren's "Ballad of Billie Potts")—and to dramatize it as forth-

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rightly as possible, with no tricks, no sneers, no "modernization."

Both circumstances and characters are very carefully selected to perform only what the play requires. Nothing is ever thrown in for good measure or for any incidental purpose. We never encounter in these plays the casual bystanders whom a Broadway dramatist might permit to wander in. What characters there are have strict requirements imposed upon them. Camus primarily demands that his protagonists possess freedom, the capacity for exercising free choice. He has to go far to find his free men. His preference sets Camus off from his contemporaries in the theater; some of this difference is implicit in the contrast Eric Bentley once drew between "Strindbergian" and "Ibsenite" actors. The Strindbergian actor is less restrained: "His emotions come right out of him with no interference whatsoever and fly like bullets at the enemy." But Ibsen, not Strindberg, is the father of modern drama, and, consequently, modern stage characters keep their neuroses in check—or at least in balance. Camus's characters tend to be Strindbergian. Some of Strindberg's unbalanced heroes earn their freedom at the expense of their sanity; one of Camus's heroes, Caligula, pays just this price for freedom. Criminal purposes inspire the principal motivation of *The Misunderstanding* and so liberate the characters from ordinary scruples. The protagonists of *The Just Assassins* are also on the far side of the law, revolutionaries who have put aside the usual inhibitions and are in the act of measuring their freedom. The most dynamic figure in *State of Siege* is, like Caligula, in possession of supreme political power and subject to no regulation by sanity. Camus's characters tear right into the issues, and they ignore small details. Just as Lear's "Pray you, undo this button," could not have occurred in Racine, it also would be an unlikely line in Camus. Everyone in these plays is ready for action—or, more often, for argument. Nothing may intervene to distract, irritate, or enchant us, to explain the characters or to provide context for the events.

The characters are free so that they may best contribute to the simple patterns which the plays work out. Of the four plays at hand, two are constructed to the very simplest formulas—*The Misunderstanding* and *The Just Assassins*. The former play requires to be read as an equation. The prodigal son returns wealthy and incognito, to be killed by his desperate mother and sister. Most have seen in this play a perfect paradigm of the absurdity of hoping to escape from poverty or exile. Camus has become more optimistic about man's fate, but, in squeezing a new interpretation out of the play, he still, inevitably, reduces it to a formula:

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It can be reconciled with a relative optimism as to man. For, after all, it amounts to saying that in an unjust or indifferent world man can save himself, and save others, by practicing the most basic sincerity and pronouncing the most appropriate word.

In other words, don't play jokes on Mother. This is what Meursault, of *The Stranger,* saw in the same story, but even this authority is not conclusive. Surely it is more exact to say that the slightest weakness, the most innocent facetious impulse, will release an absurd and implacable destiny. Still, relatively optimistic or not, the play is flesh fitted to the bare bones of an equation.

Caligula is something else again. It has more life and irony than any of the other plays, and it comes closer than any of the others to a balanced, qualified statement of a complex theme. Caligula compels us to admire his comic talents; in one unconnected episode after another, this tyrant and mass-murderer engages our interest and even our sympathy with his ingenious exposures of patrician banality and the illogic of daily life. In his defense, this engaging monster is permitted to point out that he has caused far fewer casualties than a major war. A success-

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ful revolt fortunately reminds us that, all kidding aside, we need to find some compromise between banality and the loss of freedom.

The language of these plays is lofty and pure. It reflects the complaint Camus once lodged against our time: "For the dialogue we have substituted the communique." The dramatist sets out to remedy this situation, but his dialogue tends to become, especially in *The Just Assassins* and *State of Siege,* a formal exchange of weighty remarks which too clearly expose the dramatist's designs on us. Hardly anyone else in the modern theater lectures us quite so directly. If Arthur Miller conceives of the dramatist as a public speaker, he indicates some embarrassment at this role. In *The Crucible,* he conceals his public speaking in the awkwardness of his adaptation of seventeenth-century speech. Elsewhere, his tongue-tied orators salt their remarks with reminders of their semiliteracy: "Nobody dast blame this man." But Camus addresses us in the most elevated language he can write. The result has its merits as oratory and as dialectic, but it is deficient as drama.

The defect of Camus's plays bring to mind the virtues of his fiction, in which the method of narration always keeps us from colliding too abruptly with his themes and, above all, his ideas. This rationale surely underlies the impersonality of *The Stranger* and *The Plague,* as well as the highly subjective narration of *The Fall* and "The Renegade." The danger of becoming a pamphleteer in fiction must have been clear to Camus and must have compelled him to use technique as a shield for his ideas. But, in his plays, collisions are head-on; except in *Caligula,* we miss the theater's equivalents for the sophisticated method of his fiction.

Henry Popkin

POETRY CHRONICLE

HEART'S NEEDLE. By W. D. Snodgrass. Alfred A. Knopf. $3.75.
THE SENSE OF MOVEMENT. By Thom Gunn. The University of Chicago Press. $2.75.
OF THE FESTIVITY. By William Dickey. Yale University Press. $3.50.

W. D. Snodgrass may very well have written, in *Heart's Needle,* the strongest first book of poems in fifteen years. I set this date to the appearance of Robert Lowell's *Land of Unlikeness*; it is interesting, and perhaps characteristic of two rapidly shifting eras, that while Lowell's book had found a unique and personal tone of voice which nobody else seemed then even faintly interested in reaching, Snodgrass

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has managed to be almost phenomenally successful in pitching his own range squarely in the middle of the tessitura in which so very many poets of this generation continually aspire to sing. Poems today can do many sorts of literary and speculative work. In some senses, the long, reflective poem may be thought of as the only modern equivalent of the familiar or even the formal (non-critical) essay of the last century. Other modes of writing approach the secular religious meditation, the sermon, the familiar letter and other genres whose received prose forms today usually constitute only degraded versions of what once they were. Mr. Snodgrass's poems represent the increasingly sought-after effect of the journal entry, of the autobiographical report, not assembled from deep images in a kind of rhetorical patchwork, like so many of Dylan Thomas's reminiscences, for example, but written out of considered reflections, summoned up for judgment, whose preparatory motions would always have seemed to consist rather of pencil nibbling than of vocalizing. In such a form, wit is seldom an end in itself, but instead always serves to keep the open scepticism of the narrator's scrutiny clear of the attractions of abject sentimentality on the one hand, and of self-conscious posturing on the other. Poems like "April Inventory," "A Cardinal," and the title sequence, a group of poems for the poet's daughter (it takes its title from a phrase in a translation of an Old Irish story: "an only daughter is the needle of the heart"), all succeed in being openly autobiographical, intense and delicate at once, and never embarrassing. Philip Larkin can write of himself this way; Robert Lowell's most recent poems sometimes approach this (although they are much more, I feel, than the mere autobiographical sketches they purport to be), and an occasional magnificent poem like Anthony Hecht's "The Vow" attains the right temperament in its balance of tension and relaxation of diction. But this sort of self-examination seems to be peculiarly Mr. Snodgrass's forte. He can even redeem his tendency to fall into a half-self-critical, genial-but-*serious* E. B. White kind of tone with the corrective image, as in "April Inventory":

> *The trees have more than I to spare.*
> *The sleek, expensive girls I teach,*
> *Younger and pinker every year,*
> *Bloom gradually out of reach.*
> *The pear tree lets its petals drop*
> *Like dandruff on a tabletop.*

Later on in this same poem, which will probably stand for some time as the canonical utterance of the writer of unscholarly disposition doomed, in the 1950's, to an academic life in which he will always feel

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somewhat uncomfortable, Mr. Snodgrass can be frank in a much simpler way, without once giving the reader the feeling that he is being taken by the hand and forced to look, honestly, openly, at what is deeply moving and *real*:

I taught myself to name my name,
To bark back, loosen love and crying;
To ease my woman so she came,
To ease an old man who was dying.
I have not learned how often I
Can win, can love, can choose to die.

I have not learned there is a lie
Love shall be blonder, slimmer, younger;
That my equivocating eye
Lives only by my body's hunger . . .

It is not, however, that Mr. Snodgrass can only write within one narrow range. Some of the speculative passages in the "Heart's Needle" poems, no matter what the method of selection and organization by which they evolved (such an evolution was outlined by Mr. Snodgrass himself recently in this journal) move toward a more conventional editorial tone. But they are usually as effective as the reflections of the author, moving "among the enduring and resigned / stuffed animals,"

where, through a century's
caprice, displacement and
known treachery between
its wars, they hear some old command
and in their peaceable kingdoms freeze
to this still scene,

Nature Morte. . . .

It is with a kind of inevitability, too, that after hints of the poet's concern with his own name, we find ourselves confronting the opening lines of "These Trees Stand. . ." which conclude with the poem's resonant refrain:

These trees stand very tall under the heavens.
While they *stand, if I walk, all stars traverse*
This steep celestial gulf their branches chart.
Though lovers stand at sixes and at sevens
While civilizations come down with the curse,
Snodgrass is walking through the universe.

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The only thing really disappointing about *Heart's Needle* is its relative brevity. It is not a question of the appalling slimness of the *oeuvre* of W. D. Snodgrass; but aside from the sequence of ten lyrics, there are perhaps six or seven faultless pieces among what will perhaps be the less permanent ones (the easy grace of "Returned from Frisco, 1946" has strong affinities with that of some of Mr. Snodgrass' English contemporaries, but doesn't seem to be his characteristic manner). All one can hope is that, in the future, his talent will not suffer dilution from an expansion of quantity or scope. At present, it is most impressive.

One of Mr. Snodgrass's English contemporaries seems to be currently in the process of reaching out at subjects and attitudes already somewhat modish in this country. I was considerably struck with the power of Thom Gunn's *Fighting Terms,* which appeared five years ago; his second volume, *The Sense of Movement,* originally appeared in 1957 and has just been published over here, and its strange unevenness seems to result more from a compromise, in many of the poems, with the poet's wit and sure technical control than from any direct concomitants of his new interest in the black leather jacket as a vital symbol. His opening poem, "On the Move," with its subtitle, "Man, you gotta Go" is perhaps the best of the small group in the book celebrating the American world of the motorcyclist. Its conclusion seems to me typical in many ways of Mr. Gunn's best writing:

> *A minute holds them, who have come to go:*
> *The self-defined, astride the created will*
> *They burst away; the towns they travel through*
> *Are home for neither bird nor holiness,*
> *For birds and saints complete their purposes.*
> *At worst, one is in motion; and at best,*
> *Reaching no absolute, in which to rest,*
> *One is always nearer by not keeping still.*

And yet this same poem contains lines as exceedingly undistinguished as "In goggles, donned impersonality, / In gleaming jackets, trophied with the dust." Mr. Gunn's poem on Elvis Presley concludes with what may very well constitute the best possible criticism of his own attitude towards part of his poetic subject matter: "Whether he poses or is real, no cat / Bothers to say: the pose held is a stance, / Which, generation of the very chance / It wars on, may be posture for combat." But whereas this is very good indeed, it seems to be jostled out of the way by the opening parody of "Lines for a Book," most of which would have to be much funnier to get away with it all: "I think of all the toughs

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through history / And thank heaven they lived, continually. / I praise the overdogs from Alexander / To those who would not play with Stephen Spender." Again, other poems in the book which I liked very much seemed to sort strangely with each other; a central line looks to be that of "The Inherited Estate," "Thoughts on Unpacking," "The Corridor," and the more playful sidings of "Autumn Chapter in a Novel" and "Puss in Boots to the Giant." These are all what one could come to expect from Mr. Gunn's first book, and they are the work of one of the two or three best young poets in England. But what appeared to be the blatantly Audenesque "Vox Humana" (I thought it an almost direct imitation of the "Let our Weakness speak" section of "Memorial for the City" in *Nones*), "The Unsettled Motorcyclist's Vision of His Death," "Market at Turk" and others were quite disappointing. Mr. Gunn is much better being essayistic or narrative than in attempting to be expressive in more dire ways, when a confusion between his possible roles as participant in, and observer of, the scene before him seems to lead more to rhetoric than to the poetry that Yeats claimed was made out of other sorts of internal strife.

William Dickey's careful glimpses into moments and scenes of

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disorder make use of familiar themes: the myths of the nursery taken frightfully seriously, the more common classic legends and contemporary metamorphoses, such as that of an aged dog or nervous cat. Many of his poems are more or less in the genre exemplified by David Wagoner's recent book. But Mr. Dickey in *Of the Festivity* (the final book in the Yale Younger Poets Series, incidentally, to be selected by W. H. Auden) attempts much more than Mr. Wagoner did to moralize his grotesque landscapes and prospect of dream, rather than letting the tone of his voice or some of the quirks of his diction take the full weight of his attitudes. The result is the kind of exposition referred to by Mr. Auden in his introduction as describing "nightmare worlds" "in the simplest possible language."

In poems like "A Vision, Caged," "Amazons," "The Dolls Play at Hansel and Gretel" and "Which Door? Which Door?" Mr. Dickey makes effective use of a rather mild poetic manner, guardedly ironic and taking few, if any, unnecessary risks. The last mentioned of these poems, for example, might be quoted in its entirety as a case of what has become, in the postwar decades, almost a kind of set-piece, as conventional in its way as the early seventeenth-century epigram. One might describe it as an almost epigrammatic kind of scholium on a literary or popular theme, figured forth as a possible, but wryly twisted, version of it:

Here every bottle cries O drink me quickly,
The leaves are shaped like arrow points, the eye
Befurred with drugs looks around only thickly,
The Rabbit mutters it is time to die.

Innocent Alice in this queasy mirror
Displays the breastworks of a Minoan jade;
Everything one can hear will mock the hearer,
Everything one can make will be unmade.

The Rabbit mutters and the night arises;
It must have been the wrong hole after all.
Certainly this one holds no nice surprises,
Only the consequences of the fall.

But in another kind of poem, Mr. Dickey's voice tends to sound faint rather than cleverly restrained. His book is short enough to allow one to question whether the somewhat longer, reflective type of piece exemplified by the title poem is not just as much a representative one.

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These poems deal, by and large, with the subject of love among the ruins, where "Outside, a verandah gives upon a court / Full of tin cans and whistles. Over hill / The noise of nubile screaming shreds the night." They are best when they are most compact, as in "Memoranda," a geographical survey of the poet's own bodily scars, which, despite some posturing modernism at the beginning, concludes quite powerfully and authentically:

Like hasty marks on an explorer's chart:
This white stream bed, this blue lake on my knee
Are an angry doctor at midnight, or a girl
Looking at the blood and trying not to see
What we both have seen. Most of my body lives,
But the scars are dead like the grooving of a frown,
Cannot be changed, and ceaselessly record
How much of me is already written down.

Besides this poem, I like very much "One Incident of Many," "G. F. Died 1954, Aged 27" and "Lesson of the Master." Mr. Dickey's obvious technical abilities sustain him quite well through his first volume, and perhaps the one trouble with what he has done so far results from his not having set himself sufficiently hard poetic tasks. I think that his major concerns vacillate between essayistic reflection and the more personal "speaking" of which W. D. Snodgrass is such a master; perhaps he shall have to choose one or another of these modes to strengthen somewhat. Or perhaps he will, in his next book, modulate his interests and his subjects. But in any case, his ear and his insight can bear the weight of many new challenges.

John Hollander

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CORRESPONDENCE

THE WALTER STONE MEMORIAL FUND

Gentlemen:

The death of Walter Stone in London, March 11, 1959, will be mourned especially by his many friends, who gratefully remember his unfailing kindness and sympathy. His death cut short a literary career of unusual promise. The wide attention which his writing earned is especially extraordinary because the creative work of this born writer began to be published only some eighteen months before his death. He contributed a "Report from the Academy" to PR and several poems and a short story to the *New Yorker*. More of his poetry will appear soon in Scribner's *Poets of Today* series, and Doubleday will issue a volume of his stories.

Walter Stone's friends have set up a fund to provide for the education of his three daughters. Contributions are tax-deductible. They should be made payable to the "Walter Stone Memorial Fund, Vassar College" and sent to Lynn Bartlett, Treasurer of the Fund, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York.

Sincerely yours,
Henry Popkin

MR. GINSBERG REPLIES TO MRS. TRILLING

The universe is a new flower.
Allen Ginsberg

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